

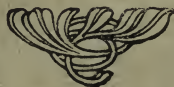
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E.P.C. Welsh Drama Series, No. 34.

The Schemer

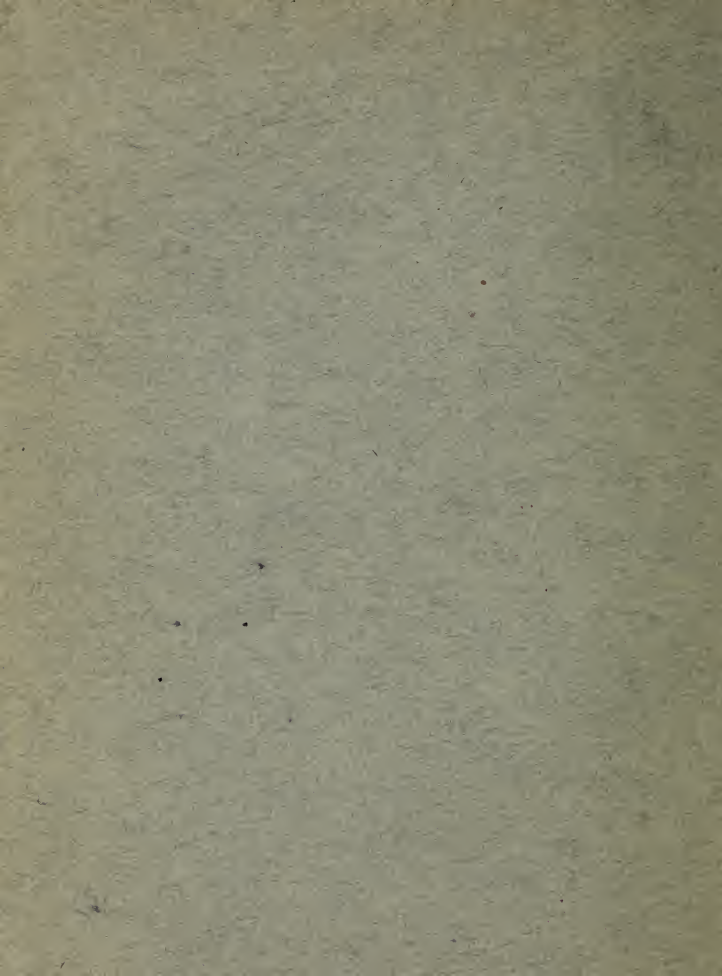
A PLAY IN THREE ACTS
AND THREE SCENES

NAUNTON DAVIES

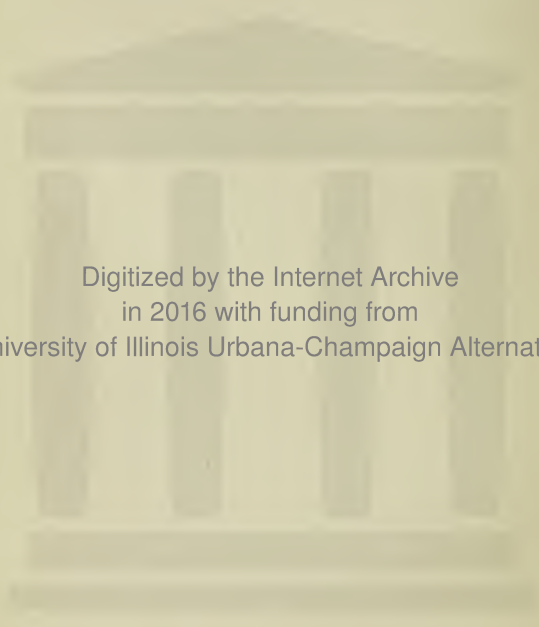


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1920



THE SCHEMER



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E.P.C. Welsh Drama Series, No. 34.

THE SCHEMER

*A Play in Three Acts
and Three Scenes*

By

NAUNTON DAVIES



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no 34

PERSONS REPRESENTED :

JACK MOSTYN - - Barrister and Mining
Engineer.

OLIVER NEWBY - - Mining Engineer.

DR. PAUL MORLEY - Mostyn's friend.

HON. BILLY PADDEN
Also as "MARTIN BULL" Financier.

ELLIS RHODES - - A Country Squire ;
owner of Garth
Estate.

MATTHEW SCOTT - Gamekeeper to Rhodes

NANCE - - - Gamekeeper's
daughter.

MURIEL MANSEL - - An heiress : Rhodes's
Niece.

SERVANT.

Celtic Grad. Cgt. Pavy. 18 ap 23 Educ. Publ. Co.

The Scene is laid in Glamorganshire and London,
in 1913.

ACT I.

SCENE : Jack Mostyn's Rooms in Town.
Twelve months pass.

ACT II.

SCENE : A room in the Gamekeeper's Cottage at
Garth, Glam.
Six months pass.

ACT III.

SCENE : Reception Room at Garth.

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ACT I.

[SCENE.—JACK MOSTYN'S rooms, door L., door R., well-furnished, cosy bachelor's apartments. Wine and dessert on sideboard. OLIVER NEWBY, a pale, self-possessed, keenly observant man, about 40, is seated in an easy chair observing with satirical amusement the uneasiness of DR. PAUL MORLEY (a genial, gentlemanly fellow about 30, with a ready smile—a student of human nature), who is strolling restlessly about the room, sitting down, then getting up again, his mind evidently perturbed. As a contrast to these you see the HON. BILLY PADDEN, a young Oxford Graduate, with reddish brown hair, clean-shaven, round, innocent-looking face, sometimes wearing a cherubic smile, at others a preternaturally solemn expression, belied by a sly twinkle in his eye. He wears a Norfolk suit of an aggressive check pattern.]

MORLEY (*vexed*): Jack's late. He should have been back from the School of Mines long ago. I wonder what has become of him, Billy?

BILLY: Don't worry, Morley. You're not his grandmother. He'll turn up presently.

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MORLEY (*looking at his watch*) : He's an hour late. What do you think of it, Newby ?

NEWBY : My dear Morley, Jack's all right—unless he's met a friend, and—(*raises a glass to his lips significantly*).

BILLY : Don't be so beastly uncharitable. More likely he's lost himself in his lecture. You know how keen he is to come out top dog.

NEWBY : I'm not uncharitable. I have a great regard for Mostyn, but I'm not blind to his weakness.

BILLY (*snatching up his hat*) : It's better to be blind than to see too much. Look here, Mr. Prophet, I'll bet you a new hat that you are wrong about Jack.

NEWBY : I dare say I am. I hope so, at any rate. It would never do for him to go wrong just now.

BILLY : Why now more than at any other time ?

NEWBY : Because he would lose the appointment in Wales, which Mr. Rhodes is keeping open for him.

BILLY : By jove ! you are right. That's why Jack's given up the Bar, and is so keen to learn all there is to learn about Colliery business.

NEWBY (*jocularly*) : Pity if he gave up one bar to waste his time in another—what !

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BILLY : Oh, dash it, bar such rotten puns—I'll go and look for him.

(Exit BILLY L. A pause.)

NEWBY : Poor old Jack ! I wonder if he'll ever get the better of his weakness ?

MORLEY (*thoughtfully*) : I'm troubled about him. His is not an ordinary case. He fears drink as he fears the devil. Do you remember his father ?

NEWBY : Died of drink, didn't he ?

MORLEY (*nods*) : The recollection of what his father was preys on his mind. He thinks he is the victim of heredity.

NEWBY : Not a pleasant idea, is it ?

MORLEY : He is so sensitive about it, too, and thinks he is much worse than he is. He struggles against it until he's physically and mentally exhausted—then the devil tempts him, and he drinks—to forget. It doesn't often happen. But the shadow of it clouds every day of his life.

NEWBY : It seems pretty hopeless, doesn't it ?

MORLEY : It would be hopeless in a selfish man. The only suffering that touches him is his own. But the generous man is quick to realise the misery he brings upon others, and when it is brought home to him he scourges himself. (*A thoughtful pause.*) Jack is one of the most sensitive men I know—a

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man of fine nature, of magnificent possibilities. It would be a thousand pities to let him drift on to the rocks.

NEWBY : Oh, we musn't let him do that. It's lucky he hasn't got any people to worry about him.

MORLEY : What about old Rhodes's ward, Muriel Mansel ?

NEWBY (*slowly, keenly watching MORLEY*) : Well, what about her ?

MORLEY : He worships that girl ; and she thinks there's no one in the world like Jack Mostyn. In his love for her he may find a talisman to stand between him and the gulf.

NEWBY : A dangerous thing for a girl to stand between a man and a gulf. Suppose he persists in plunging into the gulf : is she to be dragged down with him ? I don't fancy any girl would care to take the risk, if she knew.

MORLEY : If a girl won't take a risk for the man she loves, she isn't much use to anybody. But I have my own opinion about Muriel Mansel. She is a girl to match love for love, and make sacrifice for sacrifice, or I'm much mistaken.

NEWBY : Are you going to make her the victim of an unjustifiable experiment ?

MORLEY : Oh, no ; but an adorable figure in the apotheosis of a man.

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NEWBY : I don't suppose she has any suspicion of the truth.

MORLEY : No, and I hope there'll never be any occasion to tell her. But, if there is, Mostyn will tell her himself. I hope you don't mean to interfere ?

NEWBY : My dear Morley, how can you think such a thing ! Interfere ! I shall be only too glad to lend a hand, for old Jack's sake.

MORLEY : I thought, perhaps, you might be fond of Miss Mansel yourself ?

NEWBY : Oh, dear no—I admire her—immensely, of course, as everyone does. But Jack scores every time.

MORLEY : What do you mean ? You are both Mining Engineers, but you needn't be rivals. There's plenty of room for you both, and Jack's not the sort to grab everything for himself.

NEWBY : Well, he's won the nicest girl in the world, and, through her influence with her guardian, he's got a tip-top appointment.

MORLEY : Did you put in for Rhodes's Colliery ?

NEWBY : I did, and lost. Jack has won the great prize, and I'm left out in the cold.

MORLEY : Nothing has been settled, beyond a promise.

NEWBY : It's as good as settled. Rhodes is not the man to go back on his word.

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MORLEY (*thoughtfully*): You are right; but someone may give Jack away.

NEWBY: Ah! Old Rhodes hates drink, and he'd as soon trust his colliery and his ward to a drunkard as he would to—to (*with a laugh*) me. But only you and I and Padden know Jack's secret, and, for my part, I know how to keep it. It would never do to let him down. I wonder what would happen if anyone *did* give him away?

MORLEY: He would fight like the devil or go to the devil—God knows which! 'Sh! here's Billy.

BILLY (*off L.*): Hold up, Jack, you old duffer! (MORLEY *hastens to door L. and throws it open.* MOSTYN, *half dazed, and leaning heavily on BILLY's arm, hatless, his face and clothes mud-stained, and his necktie hanging loose, comes in unsteadily.*)

NEWBY (*in a low voice to MORLEY*): This is bad, Morley.

MORLEY (*striding up to MOSTYN—passionately*): Damn you, Jack, what do you mean by coming home like this?

BILLY: Don't be an idiot, Morley. You call yourself a doctor. Can't you see he's been hurt?

MORLEY (*with sudden change of manner*): Hurt? Where? How?

BILLY: Wait a minute, old mole. Let's get him in a chair.

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NEWBY (*places a chair for MOSTYN*): Squat, old man. Give him a drop of wine, somebody.

(*Nobody moves.*)

MOSTYN (*sinking into the chair*): Thanks, Newby. (*Pants a little.*) I feel a bit winded. Fell against a lamp-post. (*Feels his head uncertainly*)—or something.

NEWBY (*hands a glass of wine to MOSTYN*): Drink this; it'll do you good.

(MOSTYN *takes the glass. Looks doubtfully at MORLEY.*)

MORLEY (*feels MOSTYN'S pulse*): Drink it. You need it. (MOSTYN *drinks the wine slowly.*) If you feel up to it, tell us what happened.

MOSTYN (*still a little dazed*): I—I—hardly remember.

BILLY: I'll tell you. A pack of hooligans set on a policeman, and half killed him. Jack happened to come along, and there was a bit of a cyclone; and the Bobby escaped in a cloud of dust, like Elijah; and Jack got a crack across the head with a stick, for which, I believe, he gave a stamped receipt. Heard the story from a taxi-man; so it's gospel.

NEWBY (*re-filling wine-glass*): Jack, old man, you deserve another drink after that. (*Hands wine to MOSTYN.*)

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MORLEY : I don't think so, Newby. (*Takes glass from MOSTYN, and hands it back to NEWBY.*) Drink it yourself. (*NEWBY shakes his head and smiles.*)

BILLY (*to NEWBY*) : A good doctor always samples his own physic. Drink, puppy, drink !

MORLEY : Stop your fooling, Billy ; and come and help Jack to his room.

BILLY : It'll be easier than bringing the room here, won't it ?

(*MORLEY and BILLY help MOSTYN to rise.*)

MOSTYN : I'm really all right. (*Staggers.*)

BILLY : Of course you are. Why, man, you lurch about like a tramp in the Bay of Biscay, or a collier in Tiger Bay, Cardiff, ahem !—on Saturday night.

(*MOSTYN, supported by MORLEY and BILLY, limps off R.*)

(*NEWBY watches them off, and then slowly crosses the room, and stands looking at two photographs—MOSTYN'S and MURIEL MANSEL'S.*) His back is towards door R. He takes up MURIEL'S photograph, and turns it over in his hand. Reads on the back of it, "*With Muriel's love,*" aloud, and then mutters something to himself, a disagreeable expression on his face. Takes up a pen, and draws it through the words, then puts the photograph back where it was before, close to Jack's ; but the

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next moment he pushes it away some distance. BILLY looks in at door R., unseen by NEWBY, who takes up MOSTYN'S photograph, and is about to tear it up, but hears BILLY approaching. He replaces the photograph hurriedly, and turns to BILLY with a smile.)

BILLY : Mostyn's photograph doesn't seem to please you, dear boy ?

NEWBY : I—I don't think it does him justice.

BILLY (*drawling*) : Ah, to be sure—you disapprove of it as an art critic, and not as an envious man ?

NEWBY : Envious ? How can you be so ridiculous, Padden ?

BILLY (*notices that MURIEL'S photograph has been moved, replaces it in its original place*) : Miss Mansel is a nice girl, dear boy, but she's not for you.

NEWBY (*irritably*) : Don't be a fool, Padden. Your thoughtless words might do a lot of harm.

(*Enter MORLEY, L.*)

MORLEY : Jack's all right—only a bit bruised. He'll join us in a few minutes.

BILLY : We'll drink his health ! (*Glancing at NEWBY.*) Drown the green-eyed monster in a cup of wine, eh ? Give us a hand, you two, and we'll prepare the festive board.

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(BILLY and MORLEY carry wine and cigars, etc., from the sideboard to the table. As BILLY is filling the glasses, MOSTYN comes in, R., looking a little pale, but very handsome and distinguished. He limps a little. BILLY, holding a glass of wine, rises slowly, and stands on a chair, opens his mouth to speak, but gesticulates in dumb-show. The others laugh at him good naturedly.)

BILLY (*drawling in an exaggerated manner*): Prompt me, Newby; you are an expert on toasts and wine, and that sort of thing.

NEWBY: I've given up "that sort of thing" long ago. Don't appeal to me.

BILLY: Not to you as you are, dear boy, but to you as you were. I appeal to your past.

NEWBY: Don't be impertinent, Mr. Padden.

BILLY: Thanks for the distant "Mister." It places a gap between us, which I appreciate. Pardon me, Newby; my intentions are always good, like yours, but they seldom come to anything.

MORLEY: Billy, you brute, what's the matter with you?

MOSTYN: What's come to you, Billy?

BILLY: A vague suspicion—a green-eyed monstrous thing. Now I come to think of it——

NEWBY: Don't think, Padden; it might upset your mental balance.

MORLEY (*laughing*): One for you, Newby.

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BILLY: A palpable hit. I bow to Newby. Ahem! We are about to drink——

NEWBY: Drink—always drink! Why can't we wish Mostyn well without making beasts of ourselves? (MOSTYN looks thoughtful, pushes his glass away, leaves the table, and walks restlessly about the room.)

BILLY: Don't play the saint, Newby. Saints make a profit out of sinners in a deal with the devil, you know, and you are not on the make.

MORLEY: Jack! Come here and keep order. (MOSTYN rouses himself.)

MOSTYN (slowly approaching the table): What you say is true, Newby. Who should know it—if I don't! (Sits down heavily.) You have given it up. Why can't I?

BILLY: It's a frail world, my brothers, full of hypocrites masquerading in cloaks of piety. I can't pose as a saint. (Looks ruefully at his clothes.) I haven't got the outward sign of it, like (glances whimsically at NEWBY) some people.

NEWBY (annoyed): If you are going to be so beastly rude, Padden (rising) I'll go.

BILLY (waving his hand to NEWBY): Sit down, dear boy, and don't mind me. I'll give you a toast you'll appreciate.

(NEWBY hesitates. MORLEY pushes him laughingly into his chair.)

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BILLY (*glass in hand*): Gentlemen! (*bows to NEWBY*)—Newby included—You are aware of my never-ceasing struggle to become perfect.

NEWBY: Modest man!

(*MOSTYN takes little heed of what is passing, but sits in thoughtful silence gazing into the shadows, and aimlessly playing with his glass.*)

BILLY: I have tried, in a feeble way, to live on the higher plane. But the airs of the Elect whirled me off my feet, and carried me away amongst the sirens. My frailties clung to me, and pulled me down. I tried to cover my sins with Newby's spotless garments, but, alas! they didn't fit. Even the angels laughed at me. They recognised the sacred robes of a righteous man, and knew me for an impostor.

NEWBY: If you think you are poking fun at me, Padden, you are welcome to the diversion. I take you for what you are—a chartered nuisance, a candidate for cap-and-bells.

BILLY: And I thought I was giving you a lovely testimonial.

MORLEY: You are a fool, Billy.

BILLY (*bowing*): Thanks, Paul, I had my suspicions! Allow me to show you a nobler picture—of a man who has left all human weakness behind him, of a man who holds the mirror up to

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Nature ; of a paragon among pigmies—a pattern man. (*Raises glass.*) I drink (*glances whimsically at NEWBY*) to The Pattern Man ! (*Drinks.*)

(NEWBY, *looking seriously annoyed*, rises from the table, and walks away.)

MORLEY : Don't mind him, Newby. He's full of quips and cranks, and says his prayers in swears. Mostyn ! (MOSTYN *starts, roused from his reverie*. MORLEY *points at BILLY*.) Speak to that brat, and tell him to behave himself.

NEWBY : You needn't trouble ; I'm going.

MOSTYN : Stay, and we'll go out and dine together. (NEWBY *shakes his head*.)

MORLEY : If you'll stop and lend us a hand we'll put Billy under the pump.

NEWBY : I should enjoy it immensely, but I really can't stay.

BILLY (*fetches NEWBY'S overcoat, affably*) : Let me help you on with your coat, dear boy.

MOSTYN : Don't Billy. You vex me.

MORLEY : If you were a responsible person, I'd kick you——

BILLY : I can't resist that appeal, Morley. Dear Newby, depart in peace, and carry the burden of my apology with you through life ! Here's your coat. (*Hands coat to NEWBY.*) God bless you !

NEWBY (*takes coat, turns sharply away from BILLY, and holds his hand out to MOSTYN*) :

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Goodnight, Jack. (*They shake hands.*) I'm sorry to go, but I've got to keep an appointment.

BILLY : A lady in the case ?

NEWBY : Oh, of course—dozens ! I'm going down to lecture at the Girls' Guild. (*Putting on coat, and moving towards door. L.*)

BILLY : Poor girls ! I hope you won't knock spots off their modesty, and tint their pale innocence with pink. Shall I come with you to play propriety ?

NEWBY : Go to the devil ! (*Flings out, door L.*)

BILLY : Gone ! (*Bangs the table with his hand.*) And I think I'll go, too. He's too precocious to be let loose amongst the girls. (*Moving slowly towards door.*)

MOSTYN : Don't desert us, Billy.

MORLEY : Come back, you silly oaf ! (*Runs after BILLY, and pulls him back by the coat tails.*)

BILLY (*pointing to bottles of wine*) : How many bottles have you got ?

MORLEY : Enough to quieten your silly tongue.

BILLY : Good ! it's an organ that needs the "rest cure." Unhand me, sir ! (*Wriggling out of MORLEY'S hand.*) I will return anon. And now (*buttons coat, and puts on hat*) for the beastly old English weather. (*Coughs.*) Ugh ! the fog's in my throat already. (*To MORLEY.*) Have some cough drops ready by the time I come back, there's

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a good fellow. I know I shall catch cold or—Newby, or something beastly. If Newby were a better man, it would save me a lot of trouble. Confound all saints—I'd rather deal with honest sinners any day.

(Exit, door L.)

MORLEY *(thoughtfully)*: What on earth has made Billy turn against Newby so suddenly?

MOSTYN: I don't know—unless he mistrusts him because he has reformed. I wish to God I could be like him.

MORLEY: H'm! I don't know.

MOSTYN *(after a pause)*: I envy Newby.

MORLEY: Why should you envy him?

MOSTYN: He is master of himself.

MORLEY: We are all masters of ourselves—within limits.

MOSTYN: Within limits—yes! limits that shift with our inclination. That's where the trouble is.

(MOSTYN slowly paces the room, his eyes fixed upon the floor, his face expressing mental suffering. MORLEY watches him with kindly, pitying eyes. Suddenly MOSTYN stands transfixed, staring into space, as though he saw a vision. MORLEY goes up to him, and puts his hand kindly on his shoulder.)

MORLEY: What is it, Jack?

MOSTYN: Memory! I was thinking of my father. What he was I must become. It is the

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law of Nature. Paul, old man, I am afraid of myself—afraid of the future.

MORLEY: Tush! man. What have you got to fear? Your trouble is but skin deep.

MOSTYN: Your kind friendship makes you say that. Some day you will see me as I am, and will shun me.

MORLEY: Nonsense! You are over-sensitive; you rack yourself with exaggerated fears.

MOSTYN: I wish I could think so! Do men ever get the better of such a failing?

MORLEY: I have known many get the better of it, even in my short experience.

MOSTYN (*looks searchingly into MORLEY'S face*): I don't think you can know how badly I have failed. A hundred times I have vowed never to touch drink. I have struggled against it feverishly, and, after months of abstinence, the craving seizes me, and I go down in spite of myself. Look at me! See me as I am! and cease to wonder that I envy Newby his strength.

MORLEY: Upon my soul, Jack, your moral perspective is curiously lop-sided. Newby puts all his virtues in the shop window. Heaven knows what he hides in the cellar.

MOSTYN: Good God! Paul, would you have me hide the truth from myself? Nature has made me what I am. (*Fixes his eyes on the wine-bottle,*

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pushes it away from him, but his resolution fails him, and he suddenly seizes the bottle, and fills his glass.) I can't get away from it.

(He lifts the glass to his lips, and, as he is about to drink, MORLEY snatches it away from him.)

MORLEY : We'll throw it away, Jack, and try a mild dose of self-denial—play Pythagoras, and bury our old idols. Better bury them than let them bury us.

(MOSTYN moves away from the table, and paces the room restlessly.)

MORLEY *(throws away the glass of wine, then seizes champagne bottle, and apostrophises it)* : Come along, you tantalising imp, giver of transitory joys, how seductively you embrace us, and make us the victims of chance. Withal, you are a pleasant devil. *(Sighs.)*

“ 'Tis a pity wine should be so deleterious :

For tea and coffee make us much more serious.”
(Walks to window, opens it. While MORLEY'S back is turned, MOSTYN, after a struggle with himself, takes a bottle of champagne from the sideboard—the only one left—and conceals it under the table.)
You, at least, shall join your victims in the gutter.
(Drops bottle out of window.) A virtuous act, at your expense, Jack !

“ And now as Saints we begin our reign,
For which we've yearned so long in vain.”

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(Door bell rings.)

MOSTYN : Who's that ?

MORLEY *(puts away the glasses and empty bottles)* : Must keep up appearance. That's why people go to church—the world expects it. Never flout the world, Jack. It's a jealous God, with three heads : fashion, the flesh and the devil.

(Door L. is suddenly pushed open, and MURIEL MANSEL, a charming girl of about 22, comes in with sparkling quickness and a bewitching smile. MORLEY stands back in the shadows, unseen for a moment. She runs towards MOSTYN, and he hurries to meet her, with both hands held out.)

MOSTYN *(with pleased surprise)* : Muriel !

MURIEL *(gives MOSTYN her hands)* : Oh, Jack ! *(Panting.)* I'm so glad to see you, and—I'm so out of breath ! *(Her eyes sparkle with happiness.)*

MOSTYN : Muriel—darling ! *(Bends towards her as if about to kiss her, but hesitates.)*

MURIEL *(looks shyly into his face)* : You—may. *(MOSTYN kisses her.)* I didn't say what, sir. You take too much for granted.

MOSTYN : Taking such things for granted is the sweetest privilege in life.

MORLEY *(coming forward)* : Oh, I say, Jack ! *(MURIEL starts, looks confused, and exclaims " Oh ! ")* This isn't quite fair, you know.

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MURIEL (*to MOSTYN, reproachfully*) : Oh, Jack, how could you be so—so thoughtless ! I thought you were alone.

MOSTYN : It's only old Paul, and he knows all about us.

MORLEY : This is a delightful surprise. I envy Jack the privilege of welcoming you in such a fashion.

(MOSTYN *limps, in getting a chair for MURIEL. She notices it.*)

MURIEL : Why, Jack, you are lame !

MOSTYN : Oh, it's nothing.

MORLEY : Don't you believe him. He's suffering from the honourable scars of war.

MOSTYN : Be quiet, Paul.

MORLEY : All right ! I'll tell you another time.

(MOSTYN *places chair for her. She sits down.*)

MOSTYN : Tell me—when did you come to town ? How long are you going to stay ? Who came with you ?

MURIEL : Uncle came with me, of course. I hurried on before him. I *thought* you'd be surprised to see me, but wasn't quite sure you'd be pleased. (*To MORLEY.*) It's such an unconventional hour to call, isn't it ?

MORLEY : Not for you ; you'll call some day, and never go away again. It makes all the difference.

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MURIEL : Suppose I change my mind ? Women have been known to do so.

MORLEY : Change it in my favour, and I shan't complain.

(Front door bell rings.)

MURIEL : Ah ! there's Uncle. *(With mischievous smile.)* What a relief !

(Enter ELLIS RHODES, L., a bluff country gentleman of rugged features and vigorous figure, hair streaked with grey, about 60. NEWBY follows him, and stands near the door.)

RHODES *(heartily)* : How are you Jack ? *(They shake hands.)* Didn't trouble the servant to announce us. I knew this *(speaks gruffly, but glances with humourous fondness at MURIEL)* young baggage would do that.

MURIEL *(shakes her finger at him)* : Uncle !

RHODES : My dear ?

MURIEL *(severely)* : What did you say ?

RHODES *(turns away from MURIEL with a laugh, sees MORLEY)* : Ah, Morley, glad to see you. *(Shakes hands with MORLEY.)*

(MURIEL crosses to MOSTYN and chatters at every opportunity. NEWBY'S eyes follow her with jealous, stealthy admiration.)

MOSTYN *(sees NEWBY)* : Come in, Newby—come in.

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NEWBY (*comes forward*) : I met Mr. Rhodes, and thought you wouldn't mind if I returned with him.

MOSTYN (*to MURIEL*) : Newby is one of my oldest friends.

MURIEL : Yes, I know ; I have seen quite a lot of Mr. Newby lately. He is doing some work for Uncle, you know—planning a colliery or something.

(MOSTYN and MORLEY exchange astonished glances.)

MOSTYN : I didn't know that.

NEWBY : Only friendly suggestions, Jack. I wont poach on your preserves.

MOSTYN (*to RHODES*) : I thought I was to do that work for you, sir.

RHODES : Mr. Newby quite understands that. I only waited for you to qualify, and, now you have done it, I'll arrange matters with you to-day. That's what brought me up to town, to tell you the truth, and my desire to—to (*looks round the room inquiringly*) to have a look round.

NEWBY : My congratulations, Jack. I knew you'd get the post. (*Smiling.*) I am not a very formidable rival. You always score.

MOSTYN : Ah ! you are a good loser, and that's better than being a winner sometimes. If it were not for the special circumstances (*glances and smiles towards MURIEL*) I'd have stood aside.

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MURIEL : Don't be discouraged, Mr. Newby. I'll persuade my uncle to give you a post, too—as soon as there is one.

NEWBY : Thank you, Miss Mansel. Your promise reconciles me to my bad luck. I shall owe it to you if my luck changes.

(Enter BILLY, L. Runs up against NEWBY.)

BILLY : Hullo, Newby ! I thought you were at the Girls' Guild. You're beastly elusive, you know.

NEWBY : I made a mistake in the day. My memory played me a trick.

BILLY : Ah ! As long as it doesn't play other people tricks, it doesn't matter. How do you do, Miss Mansel ? *(Shakes hands with MURIEL.)* How are you, Squire ?

RHODES : Very fit, thanks, for an old man.

BILLY : You look it—*(stammers)*—not old, you know, but fit—jolly fit and frisky. *(Laughs, glances humorously at NEWBY, who is putting on his gloves)* Going for a stroll, Newby ? Wait a minute, and I'll come with you.

NEWBY : Pardon me, Mr. Padden—my way is not your way and I'm in a hurry.

BILLY : My dear fellow, my way shall be your way. I'm nothing if I'm not accommodating.

NEWBY *(drops a glove near the table, stoops to pick it up, sees the bottle of champagne under the*

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table) : Before we part, sir, don't you think we ought to drink success to the new undertaking ?

BILLY : Undertaking be blowed ! Who are you going to bury ?

RHODES (*laughing*) : With pleasure, Newby—if Jack has got any wine. I don't think he keeps any.

MOSTYN : Not a solitary bottle, I'm sorry to say.

RHODES (*looks relieved*) : Sorry, Newby. We shall have to celebrate on another occasion.

NEWBY (*drags the hidden bottle from under the table with his foot, as if by accident*) : Hullo ! what's this ? (*Picks up the bottle.*) Champagne, by all that's lucky !

(RHODES looks sharply at MOSTYN, and then meaningly at the bottle. MOSTYN's eyes fall before RHODES's gaze, and he assumes a rigid attitude, his eyes wandering slowly in MURIEL's direction, and remaining fixed upon her.)

MORLEY : Thanks, Newby ; that bottle belongs to me.

(NEWBY reluctantly hands the bottle to MORLEY. JACK relaxes his rigid attitude, and looks gratefully at MORLEY.)

MURIEL (*gaily*) : What a lucky find !

MORLEY (*smiling*) : You can't drink this stuff—it's lotion—for one of my dogs.

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NEWBY : What a pretty play upon words. If you don't know it, Miss Mansel, "lotion" and "drink" are synonymous terms—one is slang for the other.

MURIEL : I think I have heard that before.
(To MOSTYN) : Please open the bottle.

(MOSTYN *moves towards sideboard.*)

RHODES (*raises his hand to stop* MOSTYN) :
Not for me—I've changed my mind.

MURIEL (*to* RHODES) : Wilful man ! Why did you ask for it, if you didn't want it ?

RHODES (*slowly*) : You are too curious, Muriel. Sometimes curiosity leads to knowledge that we are better without.

MURIEL : I want a *serious* answer, if you please.

RHODES : Oh, if you insist, I was curious to know what sort of a cellar Jack kept.

MURIEL : Only one little bottle (*with a mischievous glance at* MORLEY) of lotion, Uncle, and that isn't his.

MOSTYN : It *is* mine, as it happens. I really forgot all about it. Your coming put it out of my head.

MORLEY (*walks quickly to window*) : The stuff is too dangerous to be left about. (*Drops bottle out of window.*) Ugh ! (*Puts handkerchief to nose.*) What a vile smell ! Come here, Newby. (NEWBY *crosses to* MORLEY.) Put your nose out there.

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(NEWBY *does as he's told.*) Horrible, isn't it?
(*Grips NEWBY'S arm and looks meaningly at him.*)

NEWBY (*draws his head in quickly*): By jove! it is nasty. What is it?

MORLEY: Spirits of tar, or something of the sort.

MURIEL (*clasping her hands*): Oh, Uncle! suppose you had drunk that horrible stuff! Would it have killed him, do you think, Dr. Morley?

MORLEY: He'd have been as dead as Saint Patrick by this time—unless I had given him an antidote.

MURIEL: You are laughing at me.

NEWBY: Of course, we are. Mostyn is looking so fearfully serious over it, it's time we laughed a little.

MORLEY: It's time we were going home, I think.

BILLY: Come along, Newby. I will accompany you to the station—the police station. I believe that's your destination!

NEWBY (*moving to the door*): Good night, Mr. Rhodes. Good night, Miss Mansel.

MORLEY and BILLY: Good night, everybody.

MURIEL, RHODES, and MOSTYN: Good night.
(*MORLEY, BILLY, and NEWBY go out, L.*)

RHODES (*to MURIEL*): I want to speak to Jack—on business.

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MOSTYN : There's a piano in the other room, Muriel.

MURIEL : Oh, indeed ! You want to get rid of me !

(MOSTYN *whispers to MURIEL, and accompanies her to door R. She goes in. He closes door after her.*)

RHODES (*turns gravely to MOSTYN*) : Dr. Morley is a good friend, but he didn't deceive me.

MOSTYN : I'm glad you were not deceived.

RHODES : Have you kept your promise ?
(MOSTYN *paces the room, troubled, silent.*) If you have any doubt about yourself, be candid, and say so. It won't do to gamble with Muriel's happiness.

MOSTYN : No ! It's the last thing I would do.

RHODES : It's the last thing you would wish to do, I'm sure. But are you sure of yourself ?

MOSTYN (*slowly*) : God help me, I am not.

(*The piano is heard fitfully from the inner room until MURIEL'S next entrance.*)

RHODES : It's honest of you to say so, and I like you none the worse for being open with me.

MOSTYN : Morley tells me that I needn't fear, but—I don't know. I try my hardest to be worthy of Muriel. More than that I dare not say.

RHODES (*earnestly*) : It is enough, if you mean it. (*With deep emotion.*) It would ruin her life

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to lose faith in you. She would never hold up her head again—if—if you failed her.

MOSTYN : Do you think I don't know it ? The thought of it is never absent from my mind. Great God ! have I not come home at night, a prey to loneliness and temptation—my senses craving for drink—to see her in fancy stealing out of the shadows to my side, to see her hand raised in warning, to hear her sob as though her heart would break, to hear her cry, “ Jack ! for my sake ” ? Have I not seen her, in my distracted fancy, her fate linked with mine, day by day suffering—drooping—breaking her heart over a worthless man ? Have I not suffered the tortures of hell in contemplating the horror of it ? Crowd the torments of a lifetime into such a night, and it would hold them all. Oh ! You can't shame me more than I have shamed myself. Let the world judge me as harshly as it will, it can never think so ill of me as I think of myself. (*Sinks into a chair, overcome by his feelings.*)

RHODES (*with deep feeling, puts his hand on MOSTYN'S shoulder*) : Come, come, Jack. It's not as bad with you as that. If we want to do a thing, the first step is to realise what we've got to do. You *have* realised it—perhaps too acutely. But it is a mistake on the right side. Believe me, it

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is better to bring trouble into the open, and fight it honestly, than pretend it doesn't exist.

MOSTYN (*raises his head*): You give me hope. But I can't help feeling that you would be wiser if you left me to my fate.

RHODES (*troubled*): I can't do that.

MOSTYN: Why? What am I to you?

RHODES: What should I be to myself if I deserted you? (*With sudden gruffness.*) Don't you see, you fool, that I mean to stick to you both, and that you are making it hard for me? How the devil can I do it if you throw my good intentions in my face? (*Glares at MOSTYN.*) If you said you were a saint, I'd believe you, because I don't want to believe anything else.

MOSTYN: Your kindness passes my understanding. I have done nothing to deserve it.

RHODES: Tush! If it comes to that, what have I done to deserve anything? Muriel is right. I'm a grumpy old bear—good for nothing but growling. (*A pause.*) Look here, Jack; I'm going to make a bargain with you, and I know you'll keep it. I want you to promise me not to see Muriel for twelve months. It will be hard for you and for—her. But it will be best for you both.

MOSTYN: Does that mean that I lose the appointment?

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RHODES : Yes, for the time being. The colliery is too close to the house for you not to meet—if you came there ; and the risk would be too great.

MOSTYN : I understand. Then you'll give the appointment to Newby ?

RHODES : Do you wish me to ?

MOSTYN : I do. He's an old friend ; and you can depend on him.

RHODES : Very well, he shall have it—for the time being.

MOSTYN : May I ask you another favour ?

RHODES : Yes ; if it's not——

MOSTYN : It's not for myself ; it's for Morley. You'll need a doctor for the colliery. Will you give him the appointment ? You couldn't do better.

RHODES : I shall only be too glad. But the men will have to be consulted. Now that you've settled your friends' affairs, what about your own ?

MOSTYN : I shall go back to the Bar.

RHODES : What ! Give up mining engineering ?

MOSTYN : I'll never go into a pit again until I can go into yours. I took up mining to be near you and Muriel. I thought I could be of use to you. In other things, whatever you wish me to do I will do.

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RHODES : Then come to Garth twelve months to-day, report yourself with a clean slate, and you'll have nothing to complain of.

MOSTYN : Twelve months to-day ! It's a long time to wait. But it's just—just !

RHODES : I hope I haven't been unfair ?

MOSTYN : No, indeed ; I wonder why you have been so kind.

RHODES (*a pause, walks from MOSTYN, communes with himself, then stops abruptly before MOSTYN, with glistening eyes, moved by pathetic memories*) : I knew your father. I have never spoken to you about him. You were in your teens when he died. In the truest sense of the word he was my friend. (*Pauses.*) I knew Muriel's mother. She was my friend. (*His head droops, his voice sinks.*) Something more than a—casual—friend. Does that explain nothing to you ?

MOSTYN : Yes ; it explains much.

RHODES : Muriel's mother was engaged to your father. He was passionately attached to her. But something happened—some misunderstanding. She threw him over, and married—my brother. Then the catastrophe came. Your father became reckless, married hastily, and gave way to drink. Such a fine fellow, too ! The pity of it ! (*Painful pause.*) He—died. I shall never forget his last days—his remorse—his anxiety for you. With

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his last breath he besought me to be kind to you, and I have done my best to be faithful to his wishes. (*Long pause. MOSTYN silently grips RHODES's hand.*)

(*Enter MURIEL, R., swiftly, with a gay laugh.*)

MURIEL: I'm tired of my own company. (*Notices their preoccupation.*) Why, what is the matter with you both?

RHODES (*recovering himself with an effort*): The shadow of the blinds fell upon us—eh, Jack? (*JACK smiles and nods, and takes MURIEL's hand.*)

MOSTYN: Yes—the shadows often fall—in this room. (*Looks into MURIEL's eyes. RHODES turns his head away, and tries to whistle a tune, fails dismally, and walks off R. hurriedly, blowing his nose.*)

MURIEL (*gently*): There is something the matter, Jack. What is it? Tell me.

MOSTYN (*takes her hands and raises them to his shoulders*): My darling! I have told you the secret of my heart. What more is there to tell?

(*Looks fondly into her eyes, and kisses her hand softly.*)

MURIEL: I don't know. There is something. You can't deceive me. Jack, dear Jack, you are unhappy—I know you are.

MOSTYN: What makes you think so?

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MURIEL : I don't know. But I'm sure you are. Tell me what it is, and I will try to help you.

MOSTYN (*distressed*) : I dare not tell you—you would despise me !

MURIEL (*smiles up at him*) : You silly, silly boy ! You may be clever, but you are not clever enough to make me despise you.

MOSTYN : You don't know how easy it would be.

MURIEL : I know it would be impossible. I'm not silly enough to believe that any man is perfect. I am a fearful example of imperfection myself, if you only knew it.

MOSTYN (*smiles*) : In what way ? I've seen no sign of it.

MURIEL : I am full of deception. (*In a shy whisper.*) I have never told you how much I love you.

MOSTYN : Tell me now, and I'll forgive you.

MURIEL : I dare not. (*A pause.*) And yet, I don't know. There is nothing selfish or mean in love, nothing that needs concealment.

MOSTYN (*in a low voice*) : But if I were—were unworthy ? Wouldn't that make a difference ?

MURIEL : Oh, Jack ; a great love is too noble a thing to trouble about small things. All the virtues are never present in any one of us, but Love's

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imagination pictures them there, for all that. Love does not calculate : it trusts.

MOSTYN : I am not worthy of such love. And yet, God knows ! I yearn for it. If you knew me as I know myself, I wonder if you would trust me ?

MURIEL (*lets her hand drop gently on his arm*) : Perhaps I know you better than you know yourself. Tell me the things you think are hidden from me, and see if I have not discounted them all.

MOSTYN : If I do that, I shall hurt you—hurt myself. (*Leads her to a chair, and looks down gravely at her.*) Can you imagine what it would be to be married to a drunkard ?

MURIEL : A drunkard ! What are you saying ?

MOSTYN (*ignoring her question*) : Has it never occurred to you that I may be a drunkard—a beast ?

MURIEL : You a drunkard ? No, you could never be that.

MOSTYN : The bare suspicion is horrible to you ?

MURIEL (*in a low voice*) : Yes ; it is horrible—horrible.

MOSTYN : Then you will loathe me—shrink from me—when I tell you—that I am——

MURIEL (*starts up, frightened*) : Stop, Jack—stop ! Don't tell me that. You are talking wildly. I won't listen to you.

MOSTYN : Drink is in my blood. I may become what my father was.

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MURIEL : Jack, dear, you musn't, you musn't talk like this. I see how it is with you. You fear what may happen, not what is.

MOSTYN : I do fear it. I can't get away from the curse of heredity.

MURIEL : Darling old Jack, you do talk nonsense. You are not half so wise as I am if you believe in such a silly old bogey as that. Heredity, indeed ! If there's anything in it, why do black sheep have white lambs ? (MOSTYN *stares at her.*) Answer me !

MOSTYN : I don't know.

MURIEL : Of course, you don't. Do you know why great men have such commonplace sons ? Can you tell me why the children of Adam and Eve are not all like their parents ?

MOSTYN (*shakes his head*) : Who has been putting all this into your head ?

MURIEL : Dr. Morley. (*Takes a book from her vanity bag.*) Here's his book. (*Opens book and reads.*) "The line of continuity is often broken by sudden upheavals and side-slips." (*Raising her eyes and smiling at MOSTYN.*) Just like a motor car, isn't it ? A side-slip ! and you don't know where you are. (*Reads.*) "You may have a giant born in the house of pigmies." (*Lifts*

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her eyes from the book.) And a pig, I suppose, born in a cowshed. That's not in the book, Jack, but it's true, all the same.

MOSTYN: What a clever little head you have got! You almost persuade me that I have been conjuring up phantoms to frighten myself with.

MURIEL: And to frighten me, you dear silly old thing. You will make me laugh at you in a minute. Believe in yourself, and don't bother about heredity. After all, it's only a symbol of Adam and Eve crudities—the aftermath of the Garden of Eden.

MOSTYN: You take my breath away!

MURIEL (*smiling*): With the wind out of Dr. Morley's sails! One more quotation. (*Reads.*) "Life is a game of chance, which plays havoc with hereditary conceptions." (*Closes book.*) There! A game of chance! Of course it is. And I am in the competition! You can be loyal to me or the Bacchanalian Goddess. Which is it to be?

MOSTYN: I will be loyal to you. You come first in my world—now and always.

MURIEL (*wistfully*): It is a pledge, Jack—a solemn pledge, is it not? Think well before you answer. If you give me your word, I know you will never break it. (*Slowly, with emotion.*) But if you do break your word, you will break my heart. It will be the end of my world!

THE SCHEMER

(MOSTYN paces the room in troubled thought. MURIEL watches him with an expression of yearning tenderness. In a moment or two he stops before her, his eyes searching her face as though he would read her soul.)

MOSTYN : Can you trust me—dare you risk the future with me, after what I have told you ? Try to realise what it would mean to you—if—I fell—and dragged you down with me.

MURIEL : I can't realise that, because it will never happen. I mean to stand by you, Jack, and help you to fight your battle. My faith in you makes me strong ; and your love for me will make you strong. I am not afraid, because I trust you. My life is yours, to shape as you will. If you accept the responsibility, I know you will never be false to your word ! It isn't in your nature to give pain to those who love you. I am going to be your talisman, your mascot ; and if moments of temptation should come, you shall think of me, and the temptation will pass. Then you shall come to me, and tell me that I have helped you. (*She takes his hand, and smiles up confidently into his face.*) Now, decide ; and let there be no going back for either of us.

MOSTYN : My darling, I accept the responsibility, and may God help me to justify your faith in me. I love you too well to lose you—too well

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to break any promise I shall ever make to you. Are you satisfied ?

(*With a glad cry, MURIEL throws herself into his arms. He kisses her. She releases herself just as the door, R., is opened, and RHODES, watch in hand, comes in like a hurricane.*)

RHODES : My word, child ! bustle-hustle, can't you ? Do you know what time it is ?

MURIEL : One minute, uncle, and I'll be ready.

RHODES (*gruffly*) : One minute, indeed ! I'll give you five—not a second more. I'm not to be played with !

MURIEL (*looks round*) : Dear, kind old grumps !

RHODES (*approaches JACK rapidly, and takes his hand*) : Good-bye, Jack ! Don't forget. (*Looks significantly at MURIEL.*) Twelve months to-day.

MOSTYN : Good-bye, Mr. Rhodes ; I'm not likely to forget.

MURIEL (*looks questioningly from one to the other*) : "Twelve months to-day"—What does it mean ?

RHODES (*glaring at MURIEL*) : It means that we are going home by the next train. It means that I have asked Jack not to see you for twelve months. There ! What do you think of me now ? Haven't I earned the hardest name you can give me ?

MURIEL (*with unnatural calmness*) : May I ask the reason for this ?

THE SCHEMER

RHODES (*harshly*) : No, you may not. It's sufficient that I've said it. Let that satisfy you.

MURIEL (*looks long and tenderly at JACK*) : There will be shadows in other rooms as well as yours, Jack, until we meet again. It will be a long separation. But as my uncle wishes it, I have nothing to say. He knows what is best. Good-bye! (*Her voice breaks.*) Good-bye—Jack! (*RHODES turns away. JACK takes MURIEL in his arms, and kisses her. She releases herself gently, and slowly follows RHODES to the door. MOSTYN follows her with his eyes. At the door MURIEL turns, looks at MOSTYN with an expression struggling between smiles and tears, and says.*) Good-bye, Jack! Don't forget—this day twelve months.

MOSTYN (*moves impulsively towards her—stops centre of stage*) : Good-bye! I shall never forget.

(*NEWBY, hat in hand, enters, L.*)

NEWBY (*apologetically*) : I'm sorry to trouble you, Mostyn. But I left a paper on the table. (*To MURIEL.*) I thought you had gone, Miss Mansel, or I wouldn't have bothered about it.

MOSTYN (*looks on the table*) : It's not here.

NEWBY : What a nuisance! I must have mislaid it elsewhere. Good-bye again, old fellow. My taxi is at the door, Miss Mansel, if you would care to use it. I see you are on the point of leaving.

MURIEL : Thank you, Mr. Newby.

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RHODES : By all means. We have altered our plans, Newby. We are going home by the next train. You may as well travel down with us.

NEWBY (*tries to hide the smile that flashes into his face*) : It is very kind of you. I shall be a poor substitute for Mostyn, Miss Mansel !

RHODES : Come along, then. (*At the door.*) Good-bye, Jack. Don't forget us at Garth. (*Exit L.*)

(NEWBY *stands at the door, holds it open for MURIEL, who turns to look back several times before the door closes upon her and NEWBY.*)

(MOSTYN'S *eyes remain fixed on the door long after she has gone ; then slowly he lifts his head, and registers a silent vow.*)

CURTAIN.

Twelve months pass.

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ACT II.

Twelve months later.

[SCENE.—*Room in the Keeper's cottage. Door back, centre ; door R., half-way down stage ; nicely furnished, carpet, sofa, screen, telephone, flowers, dining table, etc. NANCE, the keeper's daughter, is seen standing on a table near the window pinning up curtains. She is a winsome girl, dressed daintily, about twenty, with laughing eyes, and charming manner. NEWBY is looking at her in an attitude of admiration.*]

NEWBY : You look awfully fetching up there, you know.

NANCE : Don't be silly, Mr. Newby.

NEWBY (*declaiming*) : Your sunny locks hang like a golden fleece about a face as sweet as morning roses newly washed with dew.

NANCE (*laughing*) : I think I've heard something like that before.

NEWBY : The sentiment may be another fellow's, but the poetry is mine.

NANCE : You take my breath away with your audacity.

NEWBY : Alas ! too winsome for this humble place—

You need a lovelier setting for your grace.

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NANCE : Worse and worse !

NEWBY : That's a scrap of Morley's. When I flirt with the Muse, I do it on the spur of the moment.

You're beautiful ; and, therefore, to be wooed.

You're a woman, and, therefore, to be won.

NANCE : Don't you think you'd better go away before you make any more raids on the poets ?

NEWBY : Beautiful temptress ! you are too pretty for mortal man to look upon, and not wish to teach you how to love.

NANCE (*primly*) : I should want a lot of teaching how to love—you.

NEWBY : Then I'll teach you how to kiss. (*Tries to catch her as she jumps off the table, but she eludes him.*)

NANCE (*curtseying*) : There's many a slip, Mr. Newby. You should try your experiments on Miss Mansel.

NEWBY (*with a quick change of manner*) : What do you mean ? Why Miss Mansel ?

NANCE (*mockingly*) : How innocent you are ! If you are not in love with her, you've given the world a wonderfully wrong impression. If you are not in love with her, why do you spend all your time at Garth ? It makes people think you are false to your friend.

THE SCHEMER

NEWBY : I never thought of it in that way. How easy it is to stumble into a false position !

NANCE : "Stumble " is scarcely the word, when you dance attendance upon her—like her shadow.

NEWBY : I can't refuse to escort her to public places when Mr. Rhodes asks me to do so, can I ?

NANCE : I don't know what you can do, but I know what you ought to do. Poor Mr. Mostyn ! He hasn't been to Garth for ages. I wonder what has kept him away ?

NEWBY : Oh, there's a reason—an unpleasant reason. I could tell you, if you would promise not to let it go any further.

NANCE : I would do nothing to injure Mr. Mostyn. If you think you can trust me, *tell* me. But do as you like.

NEWBY : Oh, well, if you put it that way ; it's just drink. Of course, Mr. Rhodes couldn't have him near the place when he found that out.

NANCE : Drink ? You surprise me ! I didn't think Mr. Mostyn was a man of that sort. Does Miss Mansel know ?

NEWBY : I don't think so. She has given no sign.

NANCE (*with feeling*) : My father will be sorry. He thinks so much of Mr. Jack. Oh, dear ! it's very sad.

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NEWBY : It is strange what a hold Mostyn has upon his friends. (*Cheerfully.*) But there ! don't worry. He's coming here to-day.

NANCE : Coming here—to this house ?

NEWBY : Yes ; and to Garth to-morrow. I have persuaded Mr. Rhodes to bury the hatchet. The prodigal will be received with open arms.

NANCE : Oh, I'm so glad. And I'm sorry I spoke to you as I did.

NEWBY : I'm used to it. I'm a target for unkind shafts. A man is always judged to be better or worse than he is, and I'm judged to be worse—I don't mind ! But, look here, I want you to help me in a little scheme of mine—I want to give Miss Mansel a pleasant surprise.

NANCE : I will help you, with pleasure.

NEWBY : That's all right, then. She doesn't know Mostyn is coming to-day ; she thinks it's to-morrow (*NANCE nods.*) We'll ask her to tea, and spring dear old Jack upon her.

NANCE : She will be surprised !

NEWBY (*with a peculiar smile, to himself*) : Very much surprised.

NANCE : What did you say ?

NEWBY : I'll ring her up by-and-by, and ask her to come round when everything is fixed up.

(*BILLY, in his glaring check suit, knocks at the open door, R., with his cane, and looks in.*)

THE SCHEMER

BILLY (*with a drawl and a bland smile*) : The ever open door ! May I come in ?

NEWBY (*looks annoyed, in an undertone to NANCE*) : Not a word to him about Mostyn's visit. (NANCE *nods.*)

NANCE : Come in, Mr. Padden.

BILLY : Beastly weather, Newby, isn't it ? (NEWBY *turns his back upon BILLY, and bites his nails.*) Don't bite your nails, dear boy. I once knew a fellow who bit his nails, and he died. A bit stuck in him somewhere, and put a nail in his coffin, poor chap. Beastly weather, Miss Scott ?

NANCE : How can you say such a thing when the sun is shining so brightly, and the air so lovely ?

BILLY : That's where the beastliness comes in. It's the hideous deception that foretells a blizzard, or an earthquake, or nasty things like that. Distrust the sunshine, Miss Scott : it's as dangerous as (*glancing significantly at NEWBY*) some men's smiles.

NANCE : What a doleful prophet you are !

NEWBY (*superciliously*) : Oh, he's always croaking and prophesying the deluge. He has no ideas above bats and owls and things.

BILLY : Bats and owls don't thrive in a deluge, Newby. They haunt dark places, like the Nubian desert.

THE SCHEMER

NEWBY (*hits the carpet savagely with his stick and snatches up his hat*): For Heaven's sake! Nance, get your father to put up a notice: "Nuisances strictly forbidden on the premises." (*Looks at watch, moves a step or two towards the door.*)

BILLY: Dear Newby, you are surely not going to leave me already? (*Dabs his eyes with handkerchief.*) Excuse my tears. Before you tear yourself away let me beseech you not to make requests in the name of "Heaven." "Heaven" and "Newby" don't seem to rhyme somehow. It's beastly when you can't get things to rhyme. It makes you dream and have nightmare.

(NANCE *smothers her laughter.*)

NEWBY: Oh, shut up! Your conversation would enrage a saint.

BILLY: Then it can't enrage you, dear boy, for you haven't reached that stage of beatification yet.

NEWBY (*with a sneer at BILLY'S checks*): And your clothes! they'd make a donkey shy.

BILLY: Then don't look at 'em, Newby. I shouldn't like to upset you.

NEWBY: Did you ever see such vile checks! Paugh!

BILLY (*politely*): My "cheques" are always "honoured," dear boy. Keep a better balance

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at your banker's, and you won't be so sensitive. No charge for the advice, thanks.

NEWBY : Confound you ! You are more offensive than the corner boys of Whitechapel.

BILLY : Whitechapel ! the holy edifice in which your ancestors worshipped. Remember, they knelt there with their sins thick upon them ; and when they departed the chapel was whitewashed by order of the Sanitary Authority—to prevent infection. Hence its name, “ Whitechapel.” By the way, Newby, I've never come across any of your family. I suppose they all fell in the battles of the Crusades ?

NEWBY (*bites his lips, and then tries to laugh it off*) : Padden is privileged, Nance—a free-lance in the world of folly. It doesn't do to mind what he says. He's got a bumble in his bonnet, and 'tis always buzzing. (*At the door kisses his hand to NANCE.*) Don't forget our little scheme, Nance, dear ! (*NANCE frowns.*)

(NEWBY goes out with a laugh, twirling his stick, B.C.)

BILLY : What does he mean by his “ little scheme ! ” and “ Nance, dear ” ? I like his impudence !

NANCE : Don't be cross. He only said it to pay you back for annoying him. You seem to

THE SCHEMER

take a horrid delight in tormenting him, and you must expect change.

BILLY : Of course, I torment him. A pious vow binds me never to be rational in his presence. To rag him, I wear this vile coat. (*Takes off coat, and turns it inside-out.*) See ? A mournful black one side—for Newby's funeral ; a chess board on the other to teach him how to play the game. He hates checks ; and I'm hopeful that he may die some day of exasperation. (*Puts coat on black side out.*) I'm doing my best to help him.

NANCE : But why do you do it.

BILLY (*with a twinkle in his eye*) : I've got shares in an undertaker's business.

NANCE : Please be serious. I often wonder why you dislike him so much.

BILLY : Dislike him ! Why, I sacrifice myself for him daily. I sit on the see-saw of life, and keep him balanced.

NANCE : Now, don't tell stories. I really don't think he's a bad sort. He does good by stealth.

BILLY : The deuce he does !

NANCE : Yes. I am going to tell you a secret. He has prevailed upon Mr. Rhodes to make it up with Mr. Mostyn, and let him come back.

BILLY : Oh ! has he, indeed ?

THE SCHEMER

NANCE (*in a mysterious whisper*) : Mr. Mostyn is coming here this afternoon—to this very house, as Mr. Newby's guest.

BILLY : Coming *here*, this afternoon ? (NANCE *nods.*) That's strange. I knew he was coming to Garth to-morrow. It was arranged twelve months ago, and Newby had nothing to do with it.

NANCE (*blankly*) : Then he didn't tell me the truth.

BILLY : Tut ! no. He only wanted to get credit for an act of generosity. (*To himself.*) This is a new move in the game. (*Aloud.*) You don't know him. Nobody knows him but me, worse luck ! Look here, Miss Scott. I hate to see the fellow hanging about here. And why the deuce do you let him call you " Nance " ?

NANCE : I don't let him. But I can't help it. We had to give him rooms to oblige Mr. Rhodes. A gamekeeper's daughter has to put up with much that she doesn't like.

BILLY : He's a cad, or he'd see that you are a lady, and treat you as one. I want to show you something. (*He takes her arm gently, and leads her up to an oil painting on the wall. They both stand and gaze at it.*) That's a fine picture of your father ! Who painted it ?

NANCE (*diffidently*) : I—I—tried to paint him ; but, of course, I haven't done him justice.

THE SCHEMER

BILLY : My dear child—it's a marvellous picture. You could make a fortune by your painting. (*Nods towards the picture.*) There's a mystery there. I wish I knew what it was !

NANCE : I am afraid you never will know it. Whenever I speak to him about our family, he smiles gravely, shakes his head, kisses me, and walks away.

BILLY : It would make all the difference, wouldn't it, if I were one of the family ? I'd find out something then. I say, Nance—why can't we——?

NANCE (*hastily*) : Now, *you* are calling me "Nance," and it isn't allowed, you know.

BILLY : But I'm not Newby. I love the name. I want you to give me the right to call you "Nance" always. (*NANCE smiles, and shakes her head.*) I'm in dead earnest. We have known each other a long time, and I feel as if I'd been buzzing about you for generations like a bee about a sunflower, and I know that life would be jolly rotten without you.

NANCE : Bees sting—sometimes, Mr. Padden.

BILLY : Not this bee.

NANCE : It would be a great risk for you.

BILLY : No ! I love you, I like your father, and I want you to be my wife.

NANCE (*looks up at BILLY questioningly, seriously*) : Suppose I disappointed you, and you found out too late ?

THE SCHEMER

BILLY : Don't worry ! I'll insure against disappointment at Lloyd's.

(NANCE takes a timid step towards BILLY, and whispers something a little tremulously. BILLY takes her in his arms, and kisses her. Suddenly NANCE starts away from him and listens.)

NANCE : Oh ! there's my father—I know his footstep. (Runs towards door, R.)

BILLY : You little coward ! Come back, and let's face the music together.

NANCE (from the door) : Oh, Billy ! I can't.

(BILLY springs after her, but she escapes with a happy laugh, closing the door R., after her, just as her FATHER comes in, B. SCOTT is a tall, striking looking man, about fifty-five, with rather stooping shoulders, clean-shaven face marked with lines of care, hair streaked with grey. He wears a brown velvet shooting coat, brown breeches, and leather gaiters, and carries a gun.)

SCOTT (taking off his cap) : Good morning, Mr. Padden.

BILLY : Good morning, sir.

SCOTT (smiling) : Isn't your salutation a little out of place ?

BILLY : Oh, I don't know. I can't always remember that you are my friend's keeper.

SCOTT : I shall take it as a favour if you will remember it in future.

THE SCHEMER

BILLY : Oh, certainly. I didn't mean to annoy you. But, confound it all ! there's some excuse.

SCOTT : There are often excuses, but seldom reasons.

BILLY : I have reasons and excuses, at any rate. When I look at your daughter, I see a thousand reasons.

SCOTT : A gamekeeper's daughter can scarcely be interesting to a gentleman in your position. If you'll remember that, you'll oblige me.

BILLY : That's where you are wrong. She's more interesting to me than the whole pack of Society women.

SCOTT : I'm not sure that I grasp your meaning.

BILLY : Oh, bless you, they did. I'm beastly rich, you know, and these dear ladies waylaid me by the score, and vowed they (*looking at his check breeches*) doted on checks. And I never doubted them—only we spelt it differently. (*Pauses.*) I don't like Society girls—they know too much.

SCOTT (*smiling*) : You should marry an unspoiled country girl—a lady, of course.

BILLY : That's a very good idea. I've been thinking of Miss Scott.

SCOTT (*startled*) : Of my daughter ? You are rash, Mr. Padden. You know nothing about us.

BILLY : I know all I want to know, and can guess the rest.

THE SCHEMER

SCOTT (*after a troubled pause, takes a turn round the room, and halts in front of BILLY*) : Look here, Mr. Padden ; I'm not what you think I am.

BILLY : Oh, as to that, neither am I what you think I am. Neither is Newby—confound him ! He has the misfortune to be the son of his parents. I have the misfortune to be the son of a Peer.

SCOTT : A Peer's son can't mate with a game-keeper's daughter.

BILLY : Oh, look here, I say, don't be hard on the poor old pater. He's really a good sort, in spite of what the Rads say. Dukes are beyond the pale, I know, but my father is on a less exalted plane of infamy, and may be excused for daring to live. The dear old Rads give him a foot because he can't give them a hand. They are ignorant, you see, and think their beastly foot is a fair exchange for a clean hand. Now, I suppose, if I belonged to the noble class of working men, you'd say " Yes," bang off ?

SCOTT : What makes you think that ?

BILLY : Because the working man is given all he demands. He is never wrong, and never will be—so long as he can turn the scale at an election.

SCOTT : My prejudices are all in your favour, but I can't ignore your position or forget mine.

BILLY : Position be hanged ! Happiness is everything.

THE SCHEMER

SCOTT: Don't you think character counts? A man may fall, Mr. Padden, through no fault of his own. He may fall to the bottom of the abyss, or pull up half way down, bruised, amongst the rocks. That has been my misfortune. I cannot allow you to marry my daughter in ignorance of the truth. (*Reaching for his hat.*) I will walk back with you a little way, and will tell you something that will cause you to alter your mind.

(SCOTT and BILLY go out together, B.C., the former talking in a low voice. They close the door after them. In a few moments NANCE comes in quickly, R., runs to the door, B., opens it, and looks out.)

NANCE (*coming back into the room slowly*): I wonder what Dad will say? (*Sighs, smiles to herself, then tidies up the room. There is a knock at the door. NANCE opens it. MOSTYN comes in. He is dressed well, and looks well, his face wearing a smile of happiness.*) Oh, Mr. Mostyn! I'm so glad to see you. Please come in. You are earlier than I expected.

MOSTYN (*shaking hands with NANCE*): None the less welcome for that, I hope?

NANCE: No, indeed! But I'm afraid everybody is out.

MOSTYN: Ah, well, I am glad to be here! The place itself seems to smile a welcome. There's

THE SCHEMER

no place in the world holds so much interest for me as this quiet, delightful spot.

(MORLEY comes to the door, B.C., stands for a moment gazing at MOSTYN, and then bounds into the room, and slaps MOSTYN on the shoulder.)

MORLEY : Jack ! by all that's wonderful. I thought it was you ! I saw you from a distance, and followed. I didn't expect you until to-morrow.

MOSTYN : Paul, old fellow ! This is delightful. I am glad to see you again. (*They gaze at each other, and shake hands warmly.*)

(NANCE goes out, smiling to herself.)

MORLEY : I needn't ask you how you are. My observant eye tells me all is well.

MOSTYN : Yes ; the hands of Time have worked round from stormy to set-fair. I often wonder what would have happened, though, if fortune hadn't thrown us together.

MORLEY : My dear Jack ; Fortune doesn't like to be questioned : take her favours with thanks and her frowns with philosophy. You haven't got to thank me, but those fellows who have scattered experience along the path of progress for others to profit by.

MOSTYN : Have it your own way ! I'm too happy to quarrel with you. I have kept my bond, and you have kept me straight.

THE SCHEMER

MORLEY : If there hadn't been something to work upon, I should have failed. Throw a pearl into the sea, and it is lost ; take it to a suitable market, and it profits you. There are elements more potent than prescriptions lying deeply in the heart of man, if you only know how to get at them.

MOSTYN : But their existence may lie unsuspected, unless the physician comes along to throw light into the darkness. You have always had faith in me—I don't know why.

MORLEY : Listen, and I'll tell you. It has always seemed to me that vice thrives on selfishness. A selfish man is hopeless in his vice. He cares for nothing but himself, and there is nothing in his nature to appeal to. But it is different with an unselfish man—he looks beyond himself. At every false step he sees the shadows creeping into the faces of those dear to him, and his better nature awakes. Give him something to love better than himself, and all that is best in him comes to the surface.

MOSTYN : If he has this power, why doesn't he use it from the first ?

MORLEY : Because he doesn't know he has it, until some great disaster opens his eyes to the truth.

THE SCHEMER

MOSTYN : If you are right, it explains the mystery of one of the darkest problems of life. What a brute I might have been—how appallingly selfish.

MORLEY : Might have been, but you are not. You've retrieved the past. You've climbed the hill steadily to the top. You've made yourself a name.

MOSTYN : You are always counsel for the defence—ever more ready to forgive me than I am to forgive myself.

MORLEY : You are a stern judge, Jack ; sterner, I expect, than anyone else in the wide world. I envy you the credit side of your account.

MOSTYN : Envy me—me ! Good God ! Morley, you mock me. I have tasted the very dregs of degradation, and dragged myself through the shadows of the under world. I had lost everything that was worth living for.

MORLEY (*puts his hand kindly on MOSTYN'S shoulder*) : You take things too much to heart, old fellow. Don't look back—you've left the valley of the shadows for ever.

MOSTYN (*earnestly*) : Are you sure ?

MORLEY : I am sure. I would trust you in the glare of the sun, and feel certain you wouldn't blink.

MOSTYN : To know that is worth living for.

THE SCHEMER

MORLEY : Yes, old fellow, it is worth living for. By the way, why do you stay with Newby ? Why didn't you come to me ?

MOSTYN : He has been very kind to me—put many things in my way from time to time.

MORLEY : H'm ! Look here—— (NEWBY *appears at the door, B.*) Here he is.

NEWBY (*hurrying forward and grasping MOSTYN'S hand*) : My dear Jack ! Welcome to Wales !

MOSTYN : Thanks, old fellow. This is like old times. How's the colliery ? How's Billy ? How's——

NEWBY (*drily*) : Billy ! Don't mention him. He's a blot on the page of peace—a smudged hieroglyphic—a bilious patch. (*Turns to MORLEY, nods, and smiles.*) How do, Morley ?

MORLEY : Oh, all right. I must be off, Jack. I've got some patients to see. I'll see you later.

(*JACK goes to the door with MORLEY, and shakes hands with him as he leaves.*)

NEWBY : You must be hungry after your long journey. I'll get you some sandwiches and a drink to go on with.

MOSTYN : Thanks ; I should like a cup of coffee.

(*NEWBY goes out door, R. Clatter and laughter heard off B.C. BILLY pushes the door open, and rushes at JACK with outstretched hand.*)

THE SCHEMER

BILLY : Jack ! you silly old owl, how are you ?

MOSTYN : Billy ! by all that's wonderful.
(*They shake hands.*) It's good to see you again.

BILLY : And you are a healthy sight for sore eyes. I must get Morley to take me in hand, and stick the bloom of perpetual youth on my visage.
(*Looks round the room.*) Where's that budding saint, Newby ?

(NEWBY *hurries in door, R.*)

MOSTYN (*takes up a cushion, and throws it at BILLY*) : Behave yourself, Billy.

BILLY (*taking up the cushion, placing it on a chair, and sitting on it*) : Thanks, Jack ; it's very comfortable. In case you have any more, permit me to remind you that you could never bring me down to your level, even though you floored me with a cushion. Newby, dear boy, I have the felicity of expressing my admiration for you and all your works.

NEWBY : Oh, go to the devil ! (*Turns his back on BILLY.*)

MOSTYN (*laughing*) : Be quiet, you two. Tell me : how's everybody ?

BILLY : A tall order, Jack. I suppose you refer to the people at Garth ?

MOSTYN : Well, yes. I'm hungry for news. I haven't heard from——(*Pauses.*)

THE SCHEMER

BILLY : From *her*—eh ? Not since the deluge, I suppose.

MOSTYN : I haven't had a letter from—Garth—for twelve months.

NEWBY : That was in the compact, wasn't it ?

MOSTYN : Yes. How did you know ?

NEWBY : I heard it from the Squire.

MOSTYN (*to NEWBY*) : You must be on very intimate terms with Mr. Rhodes.

NEWBY : Oh, yes—very, I am happy to say.

BILLY : As thick as thieves.

MOSTYN : Be quiet, Billy. I suppose the colliery has brought many new people into the place ?

NEWBY : A good many workpeople. And there's a financial fellow you may run up against.

BILLY : Martin Bull—what ? Steer clear of him, Jack. He's a devil of a fellow ; plenty of money and very few scruples. That reminds me (*fixing his eyes on NEWBY*) I've got an appointment with him this afternoon.

NEWBY (*looking curiously at BILLY*) : What have you got to do with him ?

BILLY : Dear boy ! it would be more interesting to know what *you* have got to do with him. Is borrowing money part of the game ?

THE SCHEMER

NEWBY : You are fond of insinuating things you dare not put into plain words, Padden, and I don't like it.

BILLY : Don't despair ! The plain words will come, dear boy. (*Putting on his hat.*) In the meantime, I wish you luck and low interest. (*Turning to MOSTYN.*) You'll come and see me this evening ? I've got a lot of news for you.

MOSTYN : I'm sorry ; I've promised to spend the evening with Newby. In the morning, I'm off to Garth.

BILLY (*smiling*) : Oh, of course. But, after the goddess of Love, this mortal means to have a look in. (*Moving towards the door, B.C., waving his hand to NEWBY.*) Ta-ta ! dear boy. May we meet in Heaven ! But I hae me doots, mon—I hae me doots ! (*Goes out laughing.*)

NEWBY : Good riddance to him ! He's getting more daft every day. At last we can have a quiet talk.

(NANCE *brings in sandwiches and coffee.* NEWBY *opens bottle of champagne, watches MOSTYN'S face furtively; the cork "pops."*)

MOSTYN (*smiling*) : The voice of the enemy ! Don't pour out any for me.

(NANCE *goes out.*)

NEWBY : Has it lost its charm ?

MOSTYN : For all time.

THE SCHEMER

NEWBY : That's good news. Once upon a time you were in a bad way.

MOSTYN : That time has long passed. (*After a thoughtful pause.*) Yes ; I have kept my promise to Mr. Rhodes, and I am here to claim the fulfilment of his promise to me.

NEWBY (*forces a smile*) : So you take up the post that I have been keeping warm for you. This is the end of your probation ?

MOSTYN : The end of the old life, the beginning of the new—thanks to Morley. But for him, I should have ended my days—God knows how !

NEWBY (*sceptically*) : H'm ! he seems to have done something out of the common. You should make his wonderful remedy known, for the benefit of fellow-sufferers. Tush ! there's nothing in what he's done ; it's in you.

MOSTYN (*gets up, paces the room, speaks with deep feeling*) : It's not a subject for cynicism, Newby. Morley taught me to understand myself, and awakened ideas that gave me confidence. He opened my eyes to the sinister influence of selfishness, and proved to me how morbid fear weakens will-power. He knew that I dreaded the thought of drink, and that fear caused me to dwell upon it until mental exhaustion crept over me, and drove me to the cursed thing for forgetfulness.

THE SCHEMER

NEWBY : It's difficult to follow you. Understand me ; I want to make sure that the ground you stand on won't fall in and engulf you.

MOSTYN : If I thought there was the least chance of it, I'd turn my back on Garth for ever ! (NEWBY *pours wine into MOSTYN'S glass, apparently in absence-of-mind.* MOSTYN *smiles, and pushes it away.*) No—no, Newby—none for me, thanks.

NEWBY (*a little confused*) : Forgive me, old fellow ; I only wanted to test you. Go on with your story ; it's deeply interesting. But you appear to me to be up in the clouds, amongst visionary ideas, which have little power over material things.

MOSTYN (*smiles confidently*) : The visionary ideas, which you deride, are foundations of granite to me.

NEWBY : Quite a psychological triumph ! There must be more hypnotic suggestion in Morley's prescription than meets the eye. Unfortunately, hypnotic influence is inconstant, and, like the moon, wanes with time.

MOSTYN : I'm not afraid ! Morley made it all clear to me. His knowledge of Nature's laws enables him to place the individual in his natural niche, and study him from his special standpoint.

THE SCHEMER

The weak spots in his organisation stand out before him. Insight gives him power.

NEWBY : Morley may be a miracle-worker, and, for your sake, I hope he is. (*Pours wine into his own glass.*) Let's take him on trust, and drink his health. (*Looks at MOSTYN over the rim of his glass, and drinks slowly.*)

MOSTYN (*watches NEWBY with astonishment*) : What ! have we changed places ?

NEWBY (*smiles ambiguously*) : Oh, no. I always have wine on the table. It's my servant, not my master. It has no power to make me grovel in the gutter.

MOSTYN (*shows signs of suffering*) : You pluck up the weeds with a rough hand, old fellow.

NEWBY : Better that than let them run to seed to produce another crop. Profit by experience. Cultivate your power of resistance, as an athlete trains his muscle. (*Closely watches the effect of his words upon MOSTYN, who walks thoughtfully up and down the room, often pausing to listen, weighing NEWBY'S words.*)

MOSTYN : Is it possible that I have deceived myself ? (*In an agony of doubt.*) For God's sake ! Newby, don't try to undermine my faith.

NEWBY : If I do, it will be to put you on safer ground.

MOSTYN : How can you do that ?

THE SCHEMER

NEWBY : Oh, it's just common sense. (*At this moment, MOSTYN, facing the footlights, stands with his back towards NEWBY, his head bent, his brows knitted into an anxious frown, his chin resting on his hand. NEWBY stands behind MOSTYN a few paces, also facing the footlights; watches him furtively; takes a tablet from a small bottle, and drops it into MOSTYN's coffee. Just at this moment, SCOTT looks into the room from B.C., watches intently a few seconds, and then disappears. NEWBY turns with a sardonic smile on his face, and glances round the room.*) Drink so much to-day, so much less to-morrow, and less again the day after, until you arrive at nothing. It educates will-power, and enables a man to set temptation at defiance. The more you run away from a thing, the faster it follows you. Try my plan. (*Offers wine to MOSTYN.*)

MOSTYN (*shakes his head*) : No ! if I touched it, it would bring on the old craving.

NEWBY (*moves from the table*) : As you like, of course. (*Points to drugged coffee.*) There's coffee, if you prefer it.

MOSTYN (*takes up cup of drugged coffee*) : One can't go wrong on coffee. (*Smiles and drinks.*)

NEWBY (*watches MOSTYN drinking with a peculiar glint in his eyes*) : I didn't think you were such a coward. You should put your foot down

THE SCHEMER

and overcome your fear, or you'll stumble when you least expect it. (*Offers glass of wine, which MOSTYN takes in his hand.*) Drink it! it won't hurt you after coffee.

MOSTYN (*lifts glass to his lips*): NEWBY *watches him out of the corners of his eyes*): It's damnably seductive! But (*shakes his head, and puts wine down untasted. NEWBY turns away his face, bites his lips and frowns*) it shall never pass my lips—never, so help me, God!

NEWBY: There's many a slip—eh? But every slip may end in a fall. You stand on a treacherous slope, with a woman's precarious love between you and a precipice. Take her away, and what becomes of you?

MOSTYN (*a little slow of speech, from the effect of the drug*): Muriel will—never change. You are—an evil prophet, Newby; but you'll—have to croak—a long time—before you'll convince me. Oh, ah-h! Can't help—yawning. Oh, ah-h! The train—I suppose—

NEWBY: And the country air. It always makes you drowsy when you are unused to it. (*Watches MOSTYN'S increasing drowsiness with a furtive smile.*) Pull yourself together, Jack, and listen to me. (*MOSTYN straightens himself with a jerk.*) I want you to ask yourself what would happen if Miss Mansel threw you over.

THE SCHEMER

MOSTYN : She's not—that sort. I—I—(*yawns, puts his hand to his head, sways a little, and steadies himself with an effort.*)

NEWBY : You have more faith in women than I have. I'm not so sure of her.

MOSTYN (*rousing himself*) : What do you mean ? I'd stake—my life—(*yawns, his words dying away unuttered, puts his hand to his head.*) I can't—think. I feel—queer. What ?—Muriel—you were talking—about—her.

NEWBY : My dear fellow, you make her too much the pivot of your life. You'd be wise to discount her a little.

MOSTYN (*moves his hand slowly across his forehead, getting more dazed*) : I—I—don't—understand you. She's not—the sort—to play one—false—

NEWBY (*takes a ring from his pocket, and holds it up before MOSTYN'S eyes. MOSTYN gazes at it with a perplexed stare*) : Perhaps this will help you to understand her better.

MOSTYN : Muriel's ring !

NEWBY (*hands ring to MOSTYN, who grasps it with trembling fingers. Slowly*) : Yes ; her engagement ring. She asked me to give it to you.

MOSTYN (*holds on to back of chair, and looks at NEWBY as though he began to grasp his meaning*) : She—returns it—the ring—I gave—her—?

THE SCHEMER

NEWBY : Yes. She knew you were coming to see me, and, to spare herself the pain of seeing you, she sent it by me, thinking you would understand.

MOSTYN (*sways, struggles to recover himself*) : The pain—of seeing—*me*—the *pain*? What—does—she mean?

NEWBY : She means that she won't see you again—that she has thrown you over.

MOSTYN (*makes a determined effort to throw off his stupor*) : It's a lie—a lie! (*Lurches towards NEWBY, stumbles and falls, then slowly raises himself on his elbow, and tries to fix his wavering eyes on NEWBY.*) It's a lie—a lie!

NEWBY (*coldly*) : That ring is proof that she has done it. Here, drink some of this (*holding wineglass to MOSTYN's lips*) it will revive you (*tries to make MOSTYN drink*) : Drink! drink—and forget!

MOSTYN (*gasps*) : I will—not—drink. (*Tries to push NEWBY away.*) I'll not break my word. If she's false—to me—I'll not be—false—to her. (*With a last effort he seizes the glass from NEWBY's hand, dashes it on the floor, and sinks on to the ground, overcome by the drug. NEWBY stands over him, and looks at him with a satisfied smile, stoops down, and shakes him. MOSTYN lies still.*)

NEWBY : The sleep of the drunkard! (*Goes to the telephone, puts the receiver to his ear, and listens.*)

THE SCHEMER

Newby—Keeper's Cottage.—Yes—please ask Miss Mansel to speak to me. (*Pause.*) Oh, you are Miss Mansel. Can you come round here, and bring Mr. Rhodes with you? (*Pause.*) Why? I'll explain when I see you. (*Pause.*) You can't come? I am sorry. Mostyn is here. (*Pause.*) Oh! you've changed your mind. I shall expect you, then. (*Puts up receiver.*) So (*frowning darkly at MOSTYN*) she'll come for you. (*Fills a glass with wine, and stands looking down at MOSTYN with the glass in his hand, and spills the wine deliberately over MOSTYN'S clothes.*)

(*SCOTT appears at R., unnoticed by NEWBY, and sternly watches the scene.*) Drunk—drunk to the world! (*Looks down contemptuously at MOSTYN, and spurns him with his foot.*)

(*SCOTT comes into the room. NEWBY turns sharply with a nervous glance.*)

SCOTT: What's the meaning of this? (*Looks questioningly at NEWBY.*)

NEWBY (*with a quick change of countenance, gazes pityingly at MOSTYN, shakes his head sadly*): The meaning of it? Can't you see, he's overcome with drink? I wonder what Miss Mansel will say when she hears of it.

SCOTT (*coldly*): She musn't hear of it. Come, give me a hand and help me to lift him on to the sofa.

THE SCHEMER

(NEWBY *helps* SCOTT to lift MOSTYN on to the couch.)

NEWBY : It's a most unfortunate thing to have happened.

SCOTT : It ought never to have happened. You are very much to blame, Mr. Newby. You have abused your position in my house.

NEWBY : Oh, come ; you are going a little bit too far. I'm no more to blame than you are. One can't muzzle one's friends.

SCOTT : Perhaps not. But I should like to know what you put into his coffee ?

NEWBY (*hesitates for a moment, smiles*) : My dear man, you are terribly suspicious. I merely put a tablet of saccharine into his coffee—to sweeten it. He gets rheumatism, you know, and Dr. Morley has cut off his sugar.

SCOTT : Indeed ?

NEWBY : I see, you don't believe me.

SCOTT : I haven't said so.

NEWBY : No ; but I can see suspicion in your eyes. Don't let it run away with you.

SCOTT : It's a bad business, and I don't like it.

NEWBY (*assuming indignation*) : That is a reflection upon my honour, which I resent. My character may be a bit spotty ; but what about yours ? (SCOTT *shoots a quick glance of surprise at* NEWBY.) Ah, I thought that would touch

THE SCHEMER

you. When it comes to throwing mud, one should be certain that one's out of the line of fire.

SCOTT (*in a low voice*): What do you mean? What do you know about me?

NEWBY: Enough to get you dismissed at a moment's notice.

SCOTT: There are worse things than dismissal.

NEWBY: There are. A man might risk dismissal, but not exposure. (SCOTT *starts, droops his head.* NEWBY *continues.*) But I'm not anxious to make ghosts walk, unless you drive me to it.

SCOTT: You are considerate!

NEWBY: Oh, if you have a mind to see them, I have no objection. You'll find *your* ghost in the police court records. (*Takes newspaper from pocket and holds it up.*) The report of your trial and conviction in this paper will be pleasant reading for your employer, I think.

SCOTT: If you have read the account of my trial, you must know that I made no defence.

NEWBY: If you had a defence, you would have made it.

SCOTT: Circumstances compelled me to remain silent.

NEWBY: The law weighs evidence, not circumstances.

SCOTT (*bitterly*): Yes, the law is never wrong. Judgments are never set aside on appeal. Justice

THE SCHEMER

blunders along blindly in the dark, and never condemns the innocent by mistake. It is human to err, we are told, but justice, administered by man, never errs. (*In low passionate voice.*) My God! there are tragedies played in Courts of Justice that would rob juries of their sleep, if they only knew.

NEWBY: We'll leave it at that. I am willing to accept your story, if you are willing to accept mine. Why should we quarrel? I can help you; you can help me. We must be allies or enemies. Which is it to be—peace or war?

(NANCE comes in R., stands for a moment at the door, contemplating NEWBY and her FATHER.)

SCOTT (*hurriedly, in low voice*): 'Sh! here is my daughter.

NEWBY (*in low voice*): Peace or war?

SCOTT (*reluctantly*): Peace—so long as you do nothing to make peace impossible.

NANCE (*suddenly catching sight of MOSTYN*): Father! what is the matter with Mr. Mostyn?

NEWBY: Oh, it's nothing. He's been like this before. Let him have his sleep out, and he'll be alright. (*Looks at watch.*) Dear me, how late it is. I must be off. (*Takes his hat and stick.*) Take care of him until I return, Scott. (*Hurries out, B.*)

THE SCHEMER

SCOTT (*with a troubled glance at NANCE*): Nance, my little girl, I'm afraid there's trouble in front of us.

NANCE: Trouble, Dad? What makes you think so?

SCOTT: That man Newby. He has it in his power to injure me. (*Sits down, places a hassock near his feet, and points to it.*) Sit there, Nance. (*NANCE sits on the hassock; rests her hands on her FATHER'S knees.*) I have a story to tell you—a story that has not yet come to an end. Look into my eyes, child, and tell me if you see shame in them.

NANCE (*grasps her father's hands, and looks up into his eyes, shakes her head, and smiles*): No, Dad; there's never been anything to see in your eyes but kindness and love, and, sometimes, a little sadness.

SCOTT: Yet, my face has deceived the world. Are you sure it doesn't deceive you?

NANCE: Quite—quite sure.

SCOTT: It is a mask that has hidden a sore heart for many years.

NANCE: And I never knew it! How blind I have been! I wish—I wish I had known!

SCOTT: I'm glad you didn't. As it is, I have brought misfortune enough into your life—robbed you of many precious years of happiness.

THE SCHEMER

NANCE : You musn't say that. Have I ever said anything to make you think I was unhappy ?
(*Rises and looks at him reproachfully.*)

SCOTT (*rises, takes NANCE tenderly in his arms, strokes her hair*) : My little girl, I am going to tell you a story—of disgrace (SCOTT *sits down, and NANCE sits at his feet*) but not of deserved disgrace.

NANCE : I don't want to hear it—I won't hear it—if it will hurt you to tell me.

SCOTT : You must hear it. Mr. Padden wants you to be his wife, and you can't go to him with a mystery hanging over you. Some years ago I was tried for a crime I never committed, and was convicted on false evidence. That is why we have been living here, out of the world. That is why you have been denied the society of your equals.

NANCE : Never mind, Dad. I don't care so long as I have you. I am happy here—quite, quite happy.

SCOTT : Yes, dear child ; but how long will you be allowed to be happy here ? That man, Newby, has unearthed my past, and God knows what use he may put his knowledge to.

NANCE (*startled*) : But he is our friend. He won't do anything to injure us.

SCOTT : I wish I could think so ! (*Voices and laughter heard off B.*) Who can that be ? (*Hurries*

THE SCHEMER

to the window and looks out.) It's Miss Mansel and Mr. Rhodes! (*Turns to NANCE in dismay.*) What's to be done?

NANCE : We must ask them in, of course.

SCOTT : But they will discover Mr. Mostyn.

NANCE : What if they do? He's only asleep. I will wake him. (*Moves quickly towards couch.*)

SCOTT : Stop, Nance. (*NANCE stops, looks at her FATHER.*) You can't wake him—he's drunk.

NANCE (*clasps her hands, and looks horrified*) : Drunk! Mr. Mostyn drunk?

SCOTT : Here, quick—help me. We'll conceal him behind the screen. (*They quickly draw the screen around the couch.*)

(*Impatient knocking at the door, B.* SCOTT opens door, stands aside, and bows to MR. RHODES as he enters, followed by BILLY PADDEN (*dressed in dark lounge suit*) and MORLEY. NEWBY and MURIEL come in together slowly, after the others, talking eagerly.)

RHODES : Good-day, Scott. (*Looks round the room.*) I thought Mr. Mostyn was here.

SCOTT (*a little flustered*) : He was here a moment ago.

NANCE (*nervously*) : Didn't you meet him—out—outside?

THE SCHEMER

NEWBY (*smiling*): No; we didn't, Miss Nance. (*Looks round the room, and picks up MOSTYN'S hat.*) Here's his hat; so he can't be far off.

MURIEL (*goes to NANCE, smiling*): I expect he's hiding from us. (*NANCE looks confused, and remains silent.*) Why, what's the matter, Nance? You are hiding something from me!

NANCE: No—no! He was here a little while ago, and he was quite well, and—and I don't think he expected you.

MURIEL: Didn't you tell him we were coming, Mr. Newby?

NEWBY: No. You see, I wanted to give him a pleasant surprise. (*Sniffs the air with disgust.*) What a smell of drink! (*To MURIEL.*) Don't you notice it?

MURIEL: Yes; it's most unpleasant.

(*BILLY and MORLEY exchange uneasy glances. SCOTT looks warningly at NEWBY, who smiles amiably. RHODES glances anxiously at MURIEL, whose face wears a troubled expression. NANCE beckons furtively to BILLY, who immediately goes to her. NANCE whispers eagerly to BILLY, who nods in return.*)

BILLY (*cheerily*): My good people, our elusive guest appears to have disappeared in search of my humble self. (*Makes signs to MORLEY to back him up.*) This is an age of liberty, and even

THE SCHEMER

Mostyn may ramble into the glades of Garth—I didn't say shades, Newby—without (*waving his hand towards NEWBY*) our friend's leave. (*NEWBY looks annoyed. The general tension is suddenly relaxed.*)

MORLEY : I'm off after him. (*Moves quickly towards B.*) Come along, Billy. We'll run him to earth !

(*RHODES, in a thoughtful mood, moves slowly towards B. BILLY whispers to NANCE, and hurries towards B. SCOTT and NANCE, watchful and silent, stand between door B. and screen.*)

NEWBY (*his eyes fixed on the screen, intercepts MURIEL as she is about to pass him on her way to door*) : You'll not find him outside, Miss Mansel.

MURIEL (*faces NEWBY sharply*) : If you know where he is, why don't you say so ?

(*SCOTT looks sternly at NEWBY. RHODES, MORLEY, and BILLY turn round by the door, and fix their eyes anxiously on MURIEL. MURIEL seems inclined to go.*)

NANCE : Come, Miss Mansel ; come with me.

NEWBY : Stop, Miss Mansel. (*MURIEL pauses.*) I know Mostyn is in this house. Scott has got him hidden somewhere. He's playing a trick upon you. (*BILLY glares at NEWBY, clenches his fist at him, and mutters to himself.*)

SCOTT (*to NEWBY*) : You've no right to say that.

THE SCHEMER

RHODES (*surprised*) : What in the world is all this mystery about ?

NEWBY (*blandly*) : Ask Scott. He can enlighten you, if he will.

RHODES (*to SCOTT*) : You hear what Mr. Newby says ?

SCOTT : Yes ; perhaps he will explain what he means. (*Looking significantly at MURIEL.*) I have nothing to say.

RHODES (*impatiently*) : But I insist, sir—I insist ! If you know where Mr. Mostyn is, tell us at once.

SCOTT : I'm sorry to disoblige you, sir. If I were you, I would take Miss Mansel home, and pay no heed to what Mr. Newby says.

NEWBY : You are playing a dangerous game, Scott. But it's no good. You'd better own up, and produce Mr. Mostyn. If you don't, we shall think you are *screening* him for purposes of your own.

MURIEL : Screening Jack ? Why should he screen him ?

NEWBY : Oh, he has his reasons. But I want to give Scott a chance to set himself right, if he can.

MORLEY (*angrily*) : Speak plainly, man, can't you ?

BILLY : " Screening " is an ugly word, Newby.

THE SCHEMER

NEWBY : Ugly or not, if Scott will pull away that screen you will understand what it means. (*SCOTT backs quickly to the screen, and stands by it.*) Pull it away, Scott.

SCOTT : I am not your servant. I am master in my own house, and I'll do as I please.

NEWBY : If you won't remove it, I will. (*Advances towards the screen.*)

(NANCE, in great distress, clasps her hands, and MURIEL looks on with a fixed gaze. RHODES is gloomy with apprehension. BILLY and MORLEY follow NEWBY as he quickly thrusts out his hand to pull away the screen.)

SCOTT (*threateningly to NEWBY*) : Stand back ! (*NEWBY hastily steps back.*) Put a hand on that screen, and I'll throw you into the garden.

RHODES (*bewildered*) : The man is mad !

NEWBY : Oh, no ; he's angry, and snarls like a trapped fox, because he's found out.

MURIEL (*distressed*) : I don't know what to think. I am bewildered. Scott ! tell me the truth—please tell me the truth !

SCOTT (*earnestly*) : Go home, Miss Mansel. You can do no good by staying here. Mr. Mostyn was always my friend, and I swear to you that he shall never come to any harm at my hands.

THE SCHEMER

RHODES (*to* MURIEL) : My dear, I think we had better go. I have always found Scott an honourable man.

NEWBY : We are all honourable men—until we are found out. It's your word against mine, Scott. Take away that screen, and, if I've done you wrong, I'll apologise. If you refuse, we shall draw our own conclusions.

(SCOTT *stands motionless.*)

NANCE : Take it away, father. You have done all that a man should, and more. If they will listen to *that* man (*pointing to* NEWBY) let them do so, and the consequences be on their own heads. You have protested, you have implored, you have warned them. Very well; let them learn the truth. They shan't blame you.

NEWBY (*with a sneering laugh*) : Ah, Miss Nance, so you are in the plot, are you? I thought so!

BILLY (*threateningly*) : Take care, Newby!

NEWBY : My dear Padden, I honour you for your chivalry, but, believe me, it is in a bad cause. I'll give you one more chance, Scott (*takes an old newspaper from his pocket, and points to it with his finger*). You can stand away from that screen, or (*strikes the paper*) take the consequences.

SCOTT : Put the paper in your pocket, and play the tragedy out. I have borne more than I hope any of you will be called upon to bear, and, even

THE SCHEMER

now, I might save you (*turning to MR. RHODES*) from life-long regret—if you would let me. (*Looks earnestly, appealingly at MURIEL.*) I appeal to you, Miss Mansel—not for my sake, but for yours. I ask you to trust me. Go! for God's sake, go! Leave this house, unless you would bring down upon yourself bitter sorrow.

MURIEL (*looks earnestly at SCOTT*): I will trust you; I will do as you wish. (*Moves slowly towards B.*)

NEWBY: Stay, Miss Mansel! You owe something to me as well as to yourself, and I demand fair play.

(*As NEWBY is speaking MOSTYN stirs and groans in his sleep, falls off the sofa, causing the screen to shake, and almost fall.*)

MURIEL (*starts, trembles, fixes her eyes on the screen*): What is that?

NEWBY: It's Jack. He's fallen off the sofa. (*In an undertone to RHODES.*) It's the old—trouble—drink.

RHODES (*aloud*): Drunk! Jack drunk!

MURIEL (*with a wild glance at RHODES*): What are you saying? Oh! no—no—no! You must be mistaken—horribly mistaken. Jack was coming to see me to-morrow. No—no! he couldn't do a thing like that. (*Catches RHODES by the arm, and looks up into his face appealingly.*) Uncle!

THE SCHEMER

you do not believe it, do you? (RHODES *tries to speak, but his emotion chokes him, and he turns from her with a gesture of distress.*) Ah! you do believe it! (*Her head droops.*) And he promised—he—promised—Oh! (*Breaks off, overcome with emotion.*)

MORLEY: There's something here I don't understand. I'd stake my life on Jack keeping straight. He never for a moment forgot his promise—never! Of one thing I'm certain: We mustn't blame Scott; he could have no motive for putting temptation in his way.

NEWBY: No motive? My dear Morley, you forget he has a daughter.

(NANCE, *her eyes wide with astonishment, tremblingly clings to her FATHER.*)

BILLY (*leaps at NEWBY, but stops suddenly as he is about to strike him*): You scoundrel! (*Between his teeth.*) Wait! You shall not escape. How dare you say such a thing!

NEWBY: The offence is in the fact, not in the telling of it.

BILLY (*crosses swiftly to NANCE, takes her hand, and leads her to centre of stage*): This lady has honoured me by promising to be my wife. Now you know how much truth there is in Newby's vile insinuation.

THE SCHEMER

NEWBY (*with feigned humility*): I am sorry if I have made a mistake, but the circumstances pointed to it. I apologise.

BILLY (*furiously*): Damn your apology!

MURIEL: Nothing you can say, Mr. Newby, will shake my faith in Jack's honour. And you, Nance—you have always been my friend. But I must know. For Jack's sake, I must know. (*With sudden determination.*) I will know the truth.

(MURIEL steps swiftly up to the screen, and pulls it away before SCOTT can stop her, exposing MOSTYN lying on the floor helpless. Gazing at him wildly, she clasps her hands in an agony of grief, murmurs brokenly, "Oh Jack!" Turns away from him with faltering steps. "Has it come to this?" Her emotion ends in choking sobs.)

RHODES (*takes MURIEL gently by the arm*): My poor girl, you see how he is. I feared it all along. Come away! Come with me. My heart bleeds for you. There, there! don't weep; he is unworthy of your tears. (*Moves slowly towards B., supporting MURIEL.*) It's a sorry day for you, my darling, and it should have been such a happy one. (*At the door, he turns, and looks back at JACK'S unconscious figure, and shakes his head sadly.*) Well—well! (*Solemn pause.*) Newby, will you come with us?

THE SCHEMER

(NEWBY hurries after RHODES and MURIEL. SCOTT, MORLEY, and PADDEN grimly watch him going.)

SCOTT (to MORLEY and PADDEN) : Gentlemen, don't you think you had better go, too ? This house is under a shadow.

(MORLEY shakes his head, and walks over to MOSTYN, gazes at him earnestly, and takes his limp hand in his.)

BILLY (with his eyes fixed on NANCE) : I'll wait for Morley. Poor old Jack ! (Joins NANCE.)

(RHODES turns back to the door, B.)

RHODES (standing in the doorway, gravely) : You will leave my service this day month, Scott.

SCOTT (proudly) : I'll leave to-morrow. (Bitterly.) This is justice !

CURTAIN.

Six months pass.

THE SCHEMER

ACT III.

Six months later.

[SCENE.—Reception room at Garth, richly furnished. French window, B.C., hung with silk curtains; lawn and flower garden seen through open window. Door L. half-way down stage. MURIEL is seen seated near a table, on which there are some framed photographs and nick-nacks. She holds MOSTYN'S photograph in her hand, and gazes at it wistfully.]

MURIEL : Poor Jack ! (*Sighs.*)

(RHODES comes in slowly, F.W., his head bent down in thought. He looks older, and walks listlessly.)

RHODES (*drops his hand affectionately on MURIEL'S shoulder, his eyes straying from her to the photograph in her hand*) : Tormenting yourself again. Put that photograph away. The past is done with. You are foolish to think of it.

MURIEL : I know it's foolish. It is six months to-day since we saw (*hesitates over the name, and speaks it under her breath*) Jack last. I was wondering what had become of him. I can't help my thoughts straying, dear Uncle. Memory is all that's left to me. Don't begrudge me that ! We

THE SCHEMER

meant to spend our lives together. It is so hard to realise that I shall never see him again—that he has gone out of my life—in such a dreadful way, too.

RHODES : I know. I loved him, too. If he had been my own son, I couldn't have loved him more. (*With sudden gruffness.*) Confound him ! I'd like to have him here, and tell him what I think of him.

MURIEL : Dear old grumps ! you'd just be as kind as ever. But it does one good to hear you growl and threaten. It's like a breeze from the mountains, and lifts one up out of the depths.

RHODES : If it would bring back the smiles to your face, I'd lie on the door mat and growl all day. (*Holds out his hand for the photograph.*) Give me that thing, and I'll burn it.

MURIEL : I'll lock it up, and won't look at it again, if it displeases you. (*Goes to cabinet and locks up photograph.*)

(SERVANT announces "Mr. Newby," who comes into the room briskly, L.)

RHODES : Oh, is it you, Newby ?

NEWBY : Yes, sir. Good morning, Miss Mansel. (*Smiling.*) I am afraid I have come to talk business.

MURIEL : That's a hint for me to go, I suppose ?

THE SCHEMER

NEWBY : Oh, no. (*Smiling.*) I have no secrets from you.

RHODES (*to* NEWBY) : Has Martin Bull turned up yet ?

NEWBY : I expect him here every moment.

RHODES : Will he let me have the money ?

NEWBY : I am sure he will—if you'll let me talk it over with him before you see him.

RHODES : Very well ; make the best terms you can. Come along, Muriel, we'll go and have a look at the horses while these men talk money. (*To himself.*) Money—money !—it's always money! (*Aloud.*) Call me when you want me to sign anything. It's about all I'm good for.

MURIEL : Uncle ! you are fishing.

RHODES : Go along with you ! I'm floundering. (*MURIEL and RHODES go out, F.W.*)

NEWBY (*a jubilant smile, walks briskly about the room*) : The game is in my hands !

(*SERVANT announces "Mr. Bull," L., and retires as MARTIN BULL comes in. He has the appearance of a middle-aged, prosperous financier, with a florid face, hair turning grey, and dark eyebrows. He wears smoked glass spectacles, greyish pointed beard, and a long overcoat.*)

NEWBY (*shaking hands with BULL*) : I had almost given you up.

THE SCHEMER

BULL (*speaks quickly and in jerks*) : Never give up anything good, my friend.

NEWBY : You got my letter ?

BULL : Yes ; and don't half like it.

NEWBY : But—you have—come.

BULL : Couldn't resist the shekels, dear boy.

NEWBY (*cynically*) : No ; that's an argument that always appeals to you.

BULL (*laughs*) : Birds of a feather—eh ?

NEWBY : Tut ! talk business.

(*They seat themselves, and BULL takes documents from his pocket, and glances through them while talking.*)

NEWBY : Can we have the money ?

BULL (*thoughtfully*) : H'm ! I don't know It depends how the colliery is going on, and what you are going to do with it in future.

NEWBY : You know my plans. My cards are on the table.

BULL : Some of them, dear boy. When is the place going to pay ?

NEWBY : That depends on—circumstances.

BULL : Over which you have control.

NEWBY : If you say so. To tell you the truth, the seams I am working at present are rather soft for the market.

THE SCHEMER

BULL (*with a laugh*): Like some individuals—with a difference: They get sold and the coal doesn't—what?

NEWBY: You are smart. But your humour is out of place for the moment. (*With a queer smile.*) We are hoping that the coal will get harder.

BULL: Hope spreads an atmosphere of encouragement over the darkest transactions. Hope springs eternal—of course—just so. About £20,000 wasted over it, isn't there?

NEWBY: *Expended*, not wasted. Do be accurate. You know I have been working systematically to a definite end.

BULL: Of course. And the end is all-important to you. I have advanced £10,000 already. Remember, there is a limit to my resources.

NEWBY: And no limit to your profit. You hold a general IOU on the Garth Estate. Whatever happens, you are safe.

BULL: Yes; but what about Rhodes? He's not a patient man, and if he gets wind of your schemes——

NEWBY: Again I must ask you to be accurate. *Our* schemes, if you please. (*Goes to door, looks out, and closes it carefully.*) When Rhodes falls in with our plans, things will go on satisfactorily for him. I can make the place pay hand over hand. There's a huge fortune in the lower seams.

THE SCHEMER

BULL : And they are not to be touched, of course, until you've drawn Miss Mansel into the net and put yourself into the firm of Rhodes and Co. ?

NEWBY : You put it crudely—in a nutshell. I see, we understand one another.

BULL : I suppose so. But, upon my soul ! I begin to feel sorry for poor old Rhodes—and the girl. You are driving them devilish hard.

NEWBY : Oh, for goodness sake ! don't begin to prance on your moral stilts. You don't want to draw back, do you ?

BULL : No. I've given you my word, and I'll stick to it.

NEWBY : We'll shake hands on that. (*Offers his hand.*)

BULL (*keeps his hands behind his back*) : We don't want any symbols in a business of this sort. It stinks enough already. But for the shekels, I'd chuck it.

NEWBY (*shrugs his shoulders*) : As you like. We are in the same boat, and we've got to sink or swim together.

BULL : Then, we'll swim, dear boy. Call Mr. Rhodes in, and we'll fix up the loan right away.

NEWBY : On the same terms as before ?

BULL : A fifth of the interest for you—what ?

NEWBY : My usual commission.

BULL : Needs must when—(*Laughs.*)

THE SCHEMER

NEWBY (*moves towards F.W., turns back*) : Oh, just one word of caution, Bull. There's a fellow nosing about here trying to find out things. You must be careful. If you run up against him, have a tale ready for his ear.

BULL : Who is he ? What's he like ?

NEWBY : A pudding-faced ass, with red hair—a friend of that waster, Mostyn, and hates me like poison.

BULL : Oh, I know the bounder. It's that fellow Padden. Don't worry about him. I can twist him round my little finger.

NEWBY : If you get the chance, twist him until he squirms.

BULL : I will !

(NEWBY *calls in* MR. RHODES, *F.W.*)

BULL (*genially*) : Good morning, Mr. Rhodes, I hope I see you well, sir.

RHODES : Oh, very middling. I find this colliery business a great worry. It's most disappointing. (*Sits down heavily.*)

BULL : Liver, Mr. Rhodes—liver ! I know what it is. Why, sir, my liver has cost me thousands—in imagination. There are days when figures dance the Dead March in Gall, and send me in a fright to the doctor.

THE SCHEMER

RHODES : Your high spirits are infectious, but I'm afraid I don't catch things very easily—at least, not pleasant things.

BULL : Ha ! ha ! You'll catch a fortune some day in that colliery of yours. I have been talking things over with your manager, and think I can manage the loan you want.

RHODES : I have been thinking it over, and I don't know that I shall need it. (*BULL and NEWBY exchange glances.*) I am inclined to sell the place.

NEWBY (*anxiously*) : I hope you won't do that.

BULL : Put your price on it, Mr. Rhodes, and, if the figure is right, I may buy it, and set up as "Bull and Newby."

RHODES : Newby tells me it's worth £70,000

BULL : No ; say about half that. Collieries are in a bad way just now. The Eight Hours Bill has played the deuce with business. The men have been hit, too ; and, to add to the mess, the fools strangle trade by unprofitable strikes. If they strangled their Members of Parliament they would show some sense. Besides, there is your branch line to be made. That will cost you another £12,000 at least.

RHODES (*astonished*) : £12,000 ! Why, there's no end to it. I *must* sell, or be sold up.

BULL : My dear sir ! let me show you another side to the picture. Sink to the lower measures ;

THE SCHEMER

(NEWBY *makes signs to check BULL, who takes no notice*) ; work just enough of the upper seams to keep the engines going, and set about making your branch line. Do this, and I'll undertake to say that you will make a good thing out of it.

RHODES : It sounds well. But so many things sound better than they are.

NEWBY : You have spent a lot of money, and it would be a pity for others to reap the reward of your enterprise.

RHODES : If you advise it, I—(*hesitates*)—I don't know what to do.

NEWBY : I do strongly advise it. It would be disastrous if you were to throw the thing up now. But don't take my advice. Consult Mr. Bull. You will find him a safe guide. If you don't mind, I would rather not take any part in the discussion. Do exactly as you think best, unhampered by anything I have said. If you want me, I shall be in the garden.

RHODES : Very well. You'll find Muriel there. Try to cheer her up a bit.

NEWBY : Yes, sir ; of course I will. (*Smiles, and makes a sign to BULL, as he goes out, F.W.*)

BULL (*watching NEWBY off*) : A smart young man that, Mr. Rhodes.

RHODES : He's a dear good fellow. I don't know what I should do without him.

THE SCHEMER

BULL : It's nice to have such confidence in your manager. I suppose he's told you that I've had an expert down the pits ? (*RHODES nods.*) He estimates that it will cost £20,000 to win the deep seams, and put a profitable coal on the market. As for the money, there'll be no difficulty about that, providing I'm satisfied with the management.

RHODES : Oh, I've got the utmost confidence in Newby. It's not his fault if things haven't turned out as we expected. We can't expect any man to be a prophet.

BULL : That is so. But I have reason to believe that he means to throw up his post.

RHODES : You surprise me ! Has he told you why he wants to do that ?

BULL : Yes, he has. There's a lady in the case.

RHODES : What do you mean ?

BULL : I guess Miss Mansel is the trouble. He's very fond of her, but she keeps him at a distance. He's hard hit, and tells me he can't stand seeing her every day, and all that sort of thing. He'll go, if you can't get Miss Mansel to see things his way.

RHODES : I doubt if my niece is in a mood to think of marriage just now.

BULL : Tut-tut ! Girls are always thinking of it—at least, girls that are girls and not imitation men. It's the one thing that justifies their existence

THE SCHEMER

and keeps the world going round. She's very fond of you, and would do quite a lot to please you. Tell her what a tremendous thing depends upon this marriage, and, if she doesn't consent, I am a Dutchman. What could be better? You secure the happiness of two young people, and you get the money you need to make your fortune. By George, sir, it's an inspiration!

RHODES: But if she refuses?

BULL: She won't refuse, unless (*looks keenly at RHODES*) she still loves that worthless fellow, Mostyn.

RHODES: I sometimes think she does. A girl of her nature doesn't easily uproot her affection.

BULL: Oh, well, if she remains obdurate, I shall have to call upon you for a settlement. So far as I am concerned, that's my last word. I'm not going to risk another penny if there's new management.

RHODES: Your ultimatum leaves me little choice. I must either sell at a loss or accept your terms.

BULL (*confidentially*): Accept my terms, and you won't regret it.

RHODES (*regarding BULL earnestly*): I may be a fool to expose my position to you, but I trust a man entirely, or not at all. If my trust is misplaced you will have it in your power to ruin me.

THE SCHEMER

BULL (*with a little feeling*) : The man who would take advantage of your confidence, Mr. Rhodes, isn't in my skin. (*Looks round sharply, and listens.*) In the end you'll find me (*in a low voice*) your friend.

RHODES : I believe it, and will act upon your advice.

BULL (*rising with a sigh of relief*) : Well, that's settled !

RHODES : Will you dine with us this evening ? There will be only Newby and ourselves.

BULL : I shall be delighted.

(BULL accompanies RHODES to the door, L., opens it, and bows him out.)

BULL (*closes door quickly*) : Phew ! it's a relief to get it over. I feel like a scoundrel. (*Throws open his coat, and exposes BILLY PADDEN'S check suit.*)

(NEWBY hurries in F.W. BULL keeps his back to him while he hastily buttons his overcoat.)

NEWBY (*anxiously*) : Well ! Is it settled ?

BULL (*dolefully*) : I have mulled it, dear boy—done the biz deuced badly. (*Shakes his head gloomily.*) He wouldn't hear of your marriage with Miss Mansel. What will you do ?

NEWBY (*compresses his lips, and eyes BULL with contempt*) : Play my own game since you have failed me.

THE SCHEMER

BULL (*bursts out laughing*): You ungrateful dog! to think that you should turn and rend the hand that enriches you! It's all settled. We dine at Garth this evening. It will give you a fine opportunity to play your game with Miss Mansel. Rhodes is going to help you all he knows. His faith in you is most touching. I never felt more ashamed of you or myself than when I was wheedling him into the web you've woven round him. (*With a touch of feeling.*) He's a fine old fellow. It would be an ugly sight to see him go to the wall. (*With a sudden persuasive appeal in his voice.*) Drop the game, Newby, and go straight. It isn't too late.

NEWBY: Give up the ambition of my life, and get Mostyn back to oust me? I'm damned if I do!

BULL: Rhodes loves that beautiful niece of his, with a love that shames such a sordid passion as yours. Don't you feel a bit ashamed of yourself when you look into that girl's sad eyes, and think of the trick you mean to play her? Think, man—think! (*NEWBY walks about uneasily, biting his lips.*) It's the parting of the ways.

NEWBY: The parting of the ways of poverty and riches. If I win her, no one shall have cause to complain of me.

BULL (*with a queer intense glance*): No one—not even that poor devil, Mostyn? An old comrade,

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too! It must be hard for you to see him sink, and not hold out a helping hand.

NEWBY (*impatently*): Oh, don't waste pity on him. An unsuccessful man is never worth it.

BULL: I hear he's doing well at the Bar. (*Watches NEWBY narrowly.*)

NEWBY: That's the best place for him. I don't want him back here. You can count him out.

BULL: Don't be too sure. It's a mistake to despise an enemy.

NEWBY (*looks fixedly at BULL*): You seem to know a great deal about him?

BULL: Oh, I can't help hearing the gossip. He is certainly climbing up the ladder hand-over-hand; and if Miss Mansel got to know about it, *your* chance wouldn't be worth much.

NEWBY: There's one little point you have missed. Mostyn is on his way to Russia. (*BULL looks surprised. NEWBY smiles.*) Ah! you are surprised. But I don't take risks. I thought a trip would do him good, just as this moment.

BULL: So you sent him out there? (*NEWBY nods.*)

NEWBY: Yes; got him an arbitration job, and a stiff fee. It made me feel quite virtuous to do him a good turn.

BULL: Poor devil! he's a fine sample of a man born under an unlucky star.

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NEWBY : Well, there's one satisfaction—I didn't make that star.

BULL : No ; but you polish it up, and profit by its evil influence. People don't seem to thrive who oppose you.

NEWBY : What do you mean ?

BULL : I was thinking of Mostyn and of Scott and his daughter. Do you know what became of them ?

NEWBY : Oh, they disappeared the day after the trouble at the Lodge. Scott was suspected of luring Mostyn to the Lodge, and making him drunk, to obtain an influence over him. The fellow was a bad character—a convict, in fact.

BULL : There's a rumour in the village that Scott's innocence has been established, and that he has been reconciled to his family.

NEWBY : His family may be as shady as he is, for all I know. I don't suppose that'll do him much good.

BULL : You are mistaken. I happen to know that his eldest brother is in the Cabinet.

NEWBY : The devil he is ! But, my dear Bull, that's no recommendation. In these degenerate days, there are all sorts of men in the Cabinet—some who cater for honest men, and some for rogues. Dirty work needs dirty tools.

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BULL : Just so. (*Takes a turn round the room, thinking hard, stops in front of a writing table, places a sheet of paper on the blotting pad, and hands NEWBY a pen.*) Now that we have got so far, dear boy, I think you had better write out the IOU you have promised me.

NEWBY : Isn't my word sufficient ?

BULL : Quite sufficient, when you make your promises to the gods, but not when you make them to a financier.

NEWBY : It will be a risky document to leave about. It will be damning evidence against us, if it falls into unfriendly hands.

BULL : I shall be as careful of it as Padden is of his checks, and guard it with my life. But, please yourself. I don't move another step without it.

NEWBY : Oh, very well ; you'll take precious good care of it for your own sake.

BULL : Of course I shall.

NEWBY (*at writing table, takes up pen*) : How do you want me to word it ?

BULL (*dictates*) : " In consideration " (*NEWBY writes*) " of services rendered, I agree to pay Martin Bull £5000 on the day of my marriage with Miss Muriel Mansel, of Garth." (*Looks over NEWBY'S shoulder.*) Now, stick on a stamp. (*NEWBY puts a stamp on the document.*) Date and sign it. (*NEWBY dates and signs it, hands it to BULL.*)

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BULL : Thanks, dear boy. I wonder what that ass, Billy Padden, would give me for this paper ? My word ! there's money in it. Suppose I offer it to him ? Don't you think you'd be in Queer Street ?

NEWBY (*with a quick suspicious glance at BULL*) : You have a nasty habit of firing off unpleasant jokes. Bull. You'd really upset a nervous man.

BULL : I'm in dead earnest (*pauses, looks at NEWBY, laughs*) most times. But, of course, we couldn't have any dealings with such an idiot. (*Absently.*) Sometimes I think life is a huge joke, often a bad joke—a game of elementary passions played by men and women under the eyes of the planets. In the midst of the sunshine a great cloud comes along, and the light goes out, and there's an end of it all.

NEWBY : Bosh ! Come and have a drink.

(*As BULL and NEWBY go out arm-in-arm, RHODES and MURIEL are seen approaching the French window from the lawn. They come slowly into the room in earnest conversation.*)

MURIEL : I will do anything you wish.

RHODES : Do anything I wish, will you ? Just look at me, you foolish girl, and tell me what you see in my face to make you trust me. (*Frowns.*)

MURIEL (*smilingly looking up*) : A study in frowns, borrowed for the occasion.

THE SCHEMER

RHODES : You are a provoking hussy ! I shall be glad to get rid of you. (MURIEL *smiles up into his face.*) Don't look at me like that. (*Glares at MURIEL and stamps his foot.*) You make me feel like a ruffian. To make matters worse, you have promised to do anything I wish, not knowing in the least what I do wish. You make me out a scoundrel before I've opened my lips.

MURIEL : I am sure I like scoundrels—like you.

RHODES : Will you kindly call me a fool ?

MURIEL : Of course, I will. Haven't I promised to do anything you wish ?

RHODES : Be quiet, and stick to the point. I *am* a fool, and as I was in the beginning I always shall be.

MURIEL : Do you wish me to say "Amen" ?

RHODES : No, I don't. I haven't got to the end of my folly, yet. The truth is, I'm in a confounded corner. I must have money, or go to the dogs. This colliery business is a nightmare—a real, living, kicking, brute of a nightmare—worrying me night and day. I'd sell the beast if I could ; but I can't. The estate will have to go next—the estate I meant to leave to you. Don't interrupt ! (*Glares at MURIEL.*) I won't have you saying you don't care. I care, and that's all that matters. But I can get back all I have spent, and double it, if you will help me.

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MURIEL : Of course I will ; with all my heart, Uncle dear.

RHODES : There you go again—falling into the snare head-overheels ! “ With all your heart ” indeed ! What business have you to throw yourself away like that ? (*MURIEL laughs in his face.*) Don’t provoke me ! I am capable of any villainy. I’d sacrifice you like a shot if I thought I could make money out of you.

MURIEL : I am quite ready to be thrown to the lions, if you will stand by and see them eat me up.

RHODES : Very well ; I’ll let them have you. If you insist on throwing yourself away, I can’t help it. Oh, lord ! What an old fool I am to worry over a little thing like this. (*With sudden emotion.*) My poor little girl, the thought of parting with you——

MURIEL (*looks at RHODES with astonishment*) : Whatever are you talking about ? Parting with me ? I wouldn’t leave you, even to please you.

RHODES : I am glad you don’t want to go. There’s plenty of room at Garth for you and (*desperately*) your husband. There ! I have said it.

MURIEL (*with an incredulous stare*) : Uncle ! what *are* you talking about ?

RHODES : I thought you knew all about it. Of course, that’s the point of the whole matter. I want to save the estate for you, and I can only do

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it if you will marry. I must borrow £20,000, otherwise the place will be sold, and I shall be a poor man. I can get the money on condition that Newby is given a family interest in the colliery. Now decide for yourself ; and, remember, I would rather sacrifice the estate than ask you to sacrifice yourself.

MURIEL : I have only you to consider. I should like to please you. But the proposal has taken me by surprise. I never meant to marry. My poor little romance died—that day at the Keeper's Lodge. *(She rises and looks at RHODES wistfully.)* You must decide for me.

RHODES *(huskily)* : We'll see—we'll see—in a day or two. I will go now, and leave you to think it over. *(Flares up to escape breaking down.)* If I sit here any longer I shall quarrel with you. Out of my way, you baggage ! *(Makes a violent gesture with his hand, and hurries out.)*

MURIEL *(looks after him with glistening eyes)* : Dear—darling old Uncle ! How fond he is of me ! *(Goes slowly to the cabinet, opens the drawer, takes up MOSTYN'S photograph, and gazes at it wistfully.)* Jack ! *(Sinks into a chair.)* What—what am I to do ?

(BILLY PADDEN is seen at the French window, in his check suit.)

BILLY : May I come in ?

THE SCHEMER

MURIEL (*sitting up*) : Yes, if you can say anything cheerful.

BILLY (*approaching her smiling*) : I never say anything that isn't cheerful—except to Newby. By the way, he and that city fellow, Martin Bull, are going to dine with you this evening, I hear.

MURIEL : I believe so.

BILLY : It will be an eventful evening for you. I have been reading the stars, and they have given me a message for you.

MURIEL : I'm in a mood to take comfort from any quarter—even from the stars ! What do they say ?

BILLY : They say you've been having a jolly rotten time. They say that you must do nothing to compromise your freedom.

MURIEL : A strange message—at the present moment. It seems almost that you have guessed what my Uncle wishes me to do.

BILLY : Perhaps I have. But it's all come through star-gazing ! Venus winked at me last night in the dark, and bade me tell you to resist man's importunities. I suppose she favours me a bit—hence the wink and the tip. There's no knowing what surprise may be in store for you.

MURIEL : Is it kind to fill my mind with foolish fancies ?

THE SCHEMER

BILLY : All fancies are foolish—until they come true. They are like shadows upon the water—often the reflection of real things.

MURIEL : You make me dream—long—hope ! But do dreams ever come true ? I am afraid not—at least, for me.

BILLY : O ! thou woman of little faith. Forgettest thou that time worketh wonders ? By Jove ! I have known “ seven days and costs ” work a reformation in many a man’s character. I’ve known an earthquake digest a city in a matter of minutes, and immortalise a multitude as quick as you can shout “ Presto ! ” Why, a man can be here to-day and gone yesterday, and be reformed and transformed in the twinkling of an eye. Talk about time ! My word ! Time is going to knock even Newby out.

MURIEL : Ah, you still dislike him.

BILLY : Oh, no—I’m awfully fond of him ; I never let him out of my sight. By the way, have you heard anything of Scott since he left the day after the—you remember ?

MURIEL : Not a word.

BILLY : Well, I have found him at last. I suppose you know that it has been proved that he never did the thing he was supposed to have done, and that he has been reconciled to his family ?

MURIEL : I am so glad. I always liked Scott.

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BILLY : You musn't be surprised if you see him here to-day.

MURIEL : I'm afraid my Uncle may not like it. What is he coming for ?

(NEWBY comes in quickly, F.W.)

BILLY (*inconsequently*) : He's a good shot ; and I'll get him to shoot the prowling beast that haunts the way. No offence, Newby. That's Scripture, and applies to you and all miserable sinners.

NEWBY : Don't apologise. You are quite normal when you are rude. I didn't know you were engaged, Miss Mansel. Your Uncle told me I should find you alone.

BILLY : We are never alone, Newby ; there's always an angel or a devil at our elbow. I wonder which is at yours ?

NEWBY : There isn't much doubt—when you are near.

MURIEL : Oh, Mr. Newby ! (*To PADDEN.*) Stay and have tea with us, and make yourself agreeable. (NEWBY looks annoyed.)

BILLY : Dear Newby, will you second the proposition ?

NEWBY : With pleasure—since Miss Mansel wishes it.

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BILLY : Noble martyr ! I'm dreadfully sorry to disappoint you, but I've promised to drink tea with my old friend, Martin Bull.

NEWBY : You seem to be very thick with this man Bull ?

BILLY : As thick as thieves ! Don't forget the message from the stars, Miss Mansel. Ta-ta, dear Newby. (*Waves his hand to NEWBY from the window. Goes out.*)

NEWBY : He's more eccentric than ever. But I've not come to talk about him, but about you.

MURIEL (*in a low nervous voice*) : My Uncle prepared me to expect you, but not so soon.

NEWBY : I couldn't wait a moment after he had given me permission to speak to you. You know why I have come ?

MURIEL (*in a low voice*) : Yes.

NEWBY : You have it in your power to make me very happy—to make this moment the turning-point in my life.

MURIEL : Is anyone ever happy ?

NEWBY : Oh, yes. The world isn't such a bad place if we make the best of it.

MURIEL : Suppose we do make the best of it, and others in our little world spoil our scheme of happiness—what then ?

NEWBY (*laughs lightly*) : Let the others go, and construct a new scheme of happiness. If a man

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spoils the life of a woman, surely he should cease to interest her ?

MURIEL : May she not interest herself in his memory, and keep a place in her heart for the old days ? The past is everything to some of us, the future so little !

NEWBY : You are an angel of goodness. Women like you have something in you which subdues the evil in the worst of us. I never feel so conscious of my faults as I do when I am with you. If you could only love me a little, I would try hard to be worthy of you.

MURIEL (*gets up, and moves away a few steps, then turns, and looks thoughtfully at NEWBY*) : I wish I could ! I think there must be something wanting in me, or I should feel it easier to do as you wish. You have always been so kind.

NEWBY : Kind ? I have been your slave—your dog to fetch and carry, to wait upon your slightest wish.

MURIEL : I am not ungrateful. But memory clings, and can't be dismissed at will.

NEWBY : Is Mostyn's shadow always to stand between us ? (*He looks at her intently. She clasps her hands, and remains silent.*) If he loved you as I do, would he have done what he did ?

MURIEL (*agitated*) : Why do you remind me of him ? When I think of him, something seems to

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come between you and me, and hold me back in spite of myself—in spite of my wish to do as my Uncle wishes.

NEWBY : Forgive me ! The fear of losing you makes me say bitter things. To those who stand between us I feel pitiless. I want you to see things as they are, and not waste your sympathy on a worthless man. (*Watching her narrowly.*) You can be nothing to him ; he can be nothing to you.

MURIEL : It is not for you to order my destiny or his. We may be the puppets of a Higher Power, but not quite will-less things to be disposed of by you.

NEWBY (*slowly*) : Ah, I see, you don't know that he has left the country ?

MURIEL (*startled*) : Left the country ? I had not heard of that.

NEWBY : He has gone to Russia. He went last week. He means to settle down there.

MURIEL : To Russia ! (*A pause.*) Why did he go ?

NEWBY : To get away from his past, I suppose.

MURIEL : Yes—he had nothing to keep him here—nothing ! Did you see him before he went ?

NEWBY : I went up to town on purpose to see him. You see, I have influential friends in Petrograd, and through them I was able to put something in his way.

MURIEL : It was very good of you.

THE SCHEMER

NEWBY : I thought it would please you, and I couldn't quite forget old times. We all have our weak moments.

MURIEL : Our weak moments are sometimes our best.

NEWBY : Be weak, then, to me, and make this the best moment of my life. (*Attempts to take MURIEL'S hand, but she gently withdraws it.*)

MURIEL : Your devotion deserves a better return than the cold companionship of an unhappy woman. I am bankrupt in all that man loves best in woman. My heart is dead !

NEWBY : Are you quite just to me ? Are you quite just to yourself ? You are carrying your loyalty beyond reason. Is it possible that you can regret a man who valued your love so lightly that he could forget himself, forget you, and give himself up to debauchery ?

MURIEL (*passionately*) : I could almost hate you when you speak of him like that.

NEWBY : And I could almost hate myself. But I had to say it. Think of that day at the Keeper's Lodge. Think of him lying there drunk—unconscious of your presence—indifferent to your feelings !

MURIEL (*greatly distressed*) : Don't—don't ! It was the bitterest moment of my life—the day of my deepest humiliation. I trusted him so ! I shall never understand it—never !

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NEWBY ! You will understand it, if you don't shut your eyes to the things that have happened. Think of him that day you saw him at his rooms—limping and pale—appealing to your sympathy—the wine hidden under his table——

MURIEL : But Dr. Morley said it was not wine, and that he had had an accident.

NEWBY : He lied—to deceive you and excuse Mostyn. He had just come in from a drunken brawl in the street. Knowing these things, am I to hold my tongue, and see you go down with a man like that ? Blame me if you will. But I will risk your anger if I can save you from such a fate. My God ! To think of it ! to think of you being the wife of such a man—a drunkard, doomed by hereditary vices to a life of degradation !

(MURIEL covers her eyes with her hands, overcome with agitation. When she looks up she sees MOSTYN standing motionless, framed in the French window, his face pale, his eyes gravely fixed upon her. Well-groomed, he bears no traces of debauchery, but rather of a stern, ascetic life. NEWBY'S back is towards him.)

MURIEL *(presses her hand to her heart, instinctively shrinks from NEWBY)* : Jack !

(NEWBY wheels round sharply, sees MOSTYN, and for a moment loses his self-control, but quickly recovers himself.)

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NEWBY (*forcing a smile, and advancing to MOSTYN with outstretched hand*) : Jack, old fellow, this is unexpected.

MOSTYN (*ignores NEWBY, advances a few steps towards MURIEL*) : I was afraid I should not be admitted if I announced myself.

MURIEL (*vaguely*) : I—I thought you were in Russia.

MOSTYN : I should have been but for Padden.

MURIEL (*nervously*) : I will ring for my Uncle. (*Moves towards bell.*)

MOSTYN (*raises his hand to stop her*) : No ! What I have to say must be said to you.

MURIEL ! After what has happened (*moves a little nearer to bell*) I don't think I ought to listen to you.

MOSTYN : As you wish ; but you have wronged me enough already ; and you will wrong me deeper still if you do not hear what I have to say.

(MURIEL *looks nervously at NEWBY, as though for guidance.*)

NEWBY : He has no right to influence you.

MOSTYN : Have you any right to influence her ?

NEWBY : The right of the man who is about to become her husband.

MOSTYN : Her husband—*You !* (*To MURIEL.*) Is this true ?

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MURIEL (*greatly agitated*): No—no, Jack! I (*checks herself*)—my Uncle wished it, but I (*wildly*)—Let me go—let me go! (*Stumbles towards door, L., in blind distress.*)

MOSTYN (*gently*): You are free to go; but, remember, I am here to justify myself.

MURIEL (*her hand on the handle of the door, turns sharply, quickly lifts her head, and looks MOSTYN in the face*): If you can do that, I will stay.

NEWBY: Take care, Muriel; he has deceived you once, and he will deceive you again.

MOSTYN (*sternly facing NEWBY*): I have never deceived her—never!—and you know it. We meet here face to face, and she shall judge between us. (*Turns to MURIEL.*) This man, under the cloak of friendship, schemed to ruin me.

NEWBY: Oh, if you are going to talk like that, I must say I was unaware that you needed any assistance in that direction.

MURIEL: I don't know what to believe. It is hard for me to believe anything against either of you; and yet one of you must be in the wrong—deeply in the wrong.

NEWBY: I helped him to get the appointment in Russia. Should I have done that if I had not been his friend?

THE SCHEMER

MURIEL : No ! I had forgotten that. (*To MOSTYN.*) If he had been your enemy, he wouldn't have done that.

MOSTYN : It was because he was my enemy that he did it. He was afraid of me—afraid I should find him out, and upset his schemes at the last moment.

NEWBY : Bah ! it's a delusion of yours. Men who drink are apt to imagine things.

MURIEL (*to NEWBY*) : This is horrible. Don't say such things.

NEWBY : I don't want to hurt you ; but the truth must be told. Why doesn't he tell you of the cases I put in his hands, and of the £200 I gave him when he hadn't a penny to bless himself with, to help him to make a fresh start in life ?

MURIEL : Has he done that ? Is it true ?

MOSTYN : It was part of his scheme to lull my suspicions. I was never in need of a fresh start in life, and, thank God ! never had occasion to borrow from any man.

NEWBY : Then why did you cash my cheque ? An honourable man wouldn't have touched tainted money—even to satisfy his craving for drink.

MURIEL (*agitated*) : Oh, this is cruel !

MOSTYN : I cashed his cheque to put him off his guard, to make him think I had left the country

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—left him in security to play out his treacherous game unhindered.

NEWBY : Then, it was not I who set a trap for you, but you who set a trap for me, and schemed to turn my act of generosity against me.

MOSTYN : I wanted to catch you in the net of your own weaving, and I have caught you. (*Throws bank-notes on table.*) There's your money ! Now, I've paid my debt, and you shall pay yours, (*Crosses swiftly to F.W., pulls the curtains aside, and beckons to someone outside.*)

(BILLY PADDEN and MORLEY quickly step into the room. MOSTYN stands in the shadows near the window. MORLEY crosses to MURIEL. BILLY bows affably to NEWBY.)

NEWBY : Ah ! the Honourable William Padden and Dr. Paul Morley. (*Bows ironically.*) You will excuse me, Muriel—I've no desire to have my character discussed by these gentlemen. (*Crosses slowly, door L.*)

(*Door L. is opened suddenly by RHODES, who looks into the room with an air of surprise, and stands with one hand resting on the door. When NEWBY sees him, he pauses, bites his nails, and turns back.*)

BILLY : Don't be anxious about your character, Newby. We couldn't possibly damage it. It was only a sorry patchwork at best, and you lost the

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last shred of it when you schemed with Martin Bull to deceive Mr. Rhodes and rob him.

MURIEL (*crosses swiftly to RHODES*): Oh! Uncle. (*Clings to his arm.*)

RHODES (*to BILLY*): What's that? Rob me! You had better be careful what you say. I have the greatest confidence in Mr. Newby.

BILLY: Misplaced confidence, as you'll find.

RHODES: I won't have him insulted in my house.

NEWBY (*coolly*): I don't mind him, sir. Padden has a patent for discovering mares' nests. I know he dislikes me, and would injure me if he could; but he might have spared my friend, Martin Bull, I think.

RHODES (*fuming*): But he says you've robbed me—robbed me! I don't know how the devil you can keep cool under an insult like that.

NEWBY: An easy conscience isn't easily ruffled, Mr. Rhodes. I can bring Martin Bull here to refute this ridiculous story.

RHODES: Then you'd better bring him.

NEWBY (*moving L.*): I'll fetch him at once.

BILLY: One moment, Newby! I'll save you the trouble. (*Stands before a mirror, puts on wig, etc., and turns to face the others as MARTIN BULL, amidst exclamations of astonishment*): At your service, dear Newby. What can I do to oblige you?

THE SCHEMER

NEWBY (*to himself*) : Damnation !

BILLY : Did I catch a blessing from your lips ?

RHODES (*stammers with astonishment*) : Wh-what ! Martin Bull—Padden ! Padden—Martin Bull ! God bless my soul !

BILLY : Yes, sir. (*Glances curiously at Newby, mockingly.*) That ass Billy Padden. Mr. Newby doesn't seem to like me as Martin Bull any better than he did as Billy Padden. (*Tears off disguise.*) I think (*offers paper to RHODES*) that paper—(*NEWBY tries to snatch it out of BILLY'S hand, but fails.*) No, you don't dear boy. (*Hands paper to RHODES.*) I think that paper will throw a little light on the character of your manager.

RHODES (*takes paper, glances at it*) : Eh—what ! What's this ?

BILLY (*his eyes fixed on NEWBY*) : An agreement to pay Martin Bull £5000 for helping Mr. Oliver Newby to deceive you and decoy your niece into an unfortunate marriage.

RHODES (*to NEWBY*) : What have you got to say to this ?

NEWBY (*calmly*) : Will you let me see it ?

(*RHODES silently hands NEWBY the paper. NEWBY examines it with great care, a smile gradually dawning on his face.*) I am afraid it is a forgery, Mr. Rhodes.

RHODES : A forgery ?

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NEWBY : Yes ; and not a very clever one either. Just look at the "t's." (RHODES *looks.*) They are not crossed.

RHODES : No.

NEWBY : I always cross mine.

RHODES : You do.

NEWBY : Now look at the "i's." There is not one of them dotted.

RHODES : No.

NEWBY : I always dot mine.

RHODES : You do.

NEWBY : Now look how my name is spelled.

RHODES : Ah ! N-u-b-e-y. You spell it N-e-w-b-y. Bless my soul ! That's curious !

NEWBY : Very curious. That little mistake proves it's a forgery. A man is not likely to forget how to spell his own name. (*Folds up the paper and puts it in his pocket.*)

BILLY : But he may spell it wrongly—for a purpose. Just hand that paper over to me.

NEWBY : Oh, no. I shall hand it over to my solicitor, and prosecute you for forgery.

BILLY : Nothing could suit me better. I've photographed that precious document, dear saint. I thought you might destroy it—by mistake. Mistakes do happen, you know—as they did that day at the Keeper's Lodge.

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NEWBY : I haven't the least notion what you are talking about.

BILLY : No ? Then I'll enlighten you. It was a mistake to arrange that damnable scene, and make Mr. Rhodes believe that Mostyn was drunk.

RHODES (*excitedly*) : What do you say—what do you say ?

BILLY : Jack was not drunk : he was drugged.

MURIEL (*horrified*) : Drugged !

RHODES : Good God ! I can't believe it.

BILLY : It is true. Scott saw Newby putting some stuff out of a bottle into Jack's coffee.

(SCOTT *draws aside the curtains at the French window, and is seen by the audience, but not by those on the stage, looking watchfully on.*)

MORLEY : It was opium. I found it in the cup Jack drank out of.

NEWBY : It's a lie—a wicked lie.

BILLY : Scott is here to prove it. (*Waves his hand towards F.W.*)

(SCOTT *takes one step into the room, and pauses. NANCE is seen just behind him, looking very charming, but excited, in a pretty hat and becoming costume. SCOTT is wearing a dark lounge suit of grey, and carries himself with the air of a man of good breeding, his expression cold and stern as his eyes glance from NEWBY to RHODES.*)

RHODES (*bewildered*) : God bless my soul !

THE SCHEMER

MURIEL (*shrinking from NEWBY*): It's too horrible—too horrible!

(MOSTYN comes out of the shadows towards MURIEL. She looks at him pitifully, appealingly, pauses doubtfully. BILLY crosses to NANCE.)

MURIEL (*holding out her hands appealingly to MOSTYN*): Jack! Can you ever forgive me?

(MOSTYN swiftly takes MURIEL in his arms. NEWBY, unobserved, slinks out.)

RHODES (*struggling with his feelings*): Eh—what! Bless my soul! (*Seizes MOSTYN's hand.*) My dear boy! What a fool I've been! (*Turns quickly, impulsively to SCOTT.*) And you too. (*Grips SCOTT's hand. SCOTT smiles.*) I—I'm a double fool.

SCOTT: We are all fools at times.

BILLY (*smiling down at NANCE, and nodding towards MOSTYN and MURIEL*): Can't we follow their example, Nance?

NANCE (*shyly*): I don't know.

BILLY: Then I'll answer for you. (*Kisses NANCE.*)

CURTAIN.



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PLAYS BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THREE or FOUR ACTS.

- *The Human Factor.
- *The Schemer.
- *The Second Son.
Daughters of Eve.
- *The Great Experiment.
- *The Arrogance of Power.
- *The Crash.
Foiled (*for Amateurs*).

ONE ACT.

- *The Village Wizard.
A Near Thing.
- *The Conversion.
- *The Epidemic.
- *A Monologue for Me.
The Girl from Cardiff.
The Counter Stroke.
A Pair of Bracelets.

By NAUNTON DAVIES, in collaboration with
LEON M. LION.

- The Cobweb. (Four acts.)
- The Wanton. (One act.)
- Red Luck. (One act.)

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